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RUSSIAN HOSTS
AND ENGLISH GUESTS
IN CENTRAL ASIA

GENERAL KOUROPATKINE.
Russian Minister of War and late Governor-General of Transcaspia.

RUSSIAN HOSTS

AND ENGLISH GUESTS

IN CENTRAL ASIA

BY

J. T. WOOLRYCH PEROWNE

56801

WITH SIXTY ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

2x-n-31

LONDON
THE SCIENTIFIC PRESS, LIMITED
1898

915.8
Per/Rus
56801

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
At the Ballantyne Press

TO

MY WIFE

DEDICATE THIS

BOOK

PREFACE

In the following pages I have done nothing more than describe a journey, made in November and December last, over the Transcaspian Military Railway in Russian Central Asia. I have purposely avoided any attempt to make a volume that should bring up to date our knowledge of the geographical or commercial or political aspect of the countries we visited. But I feel very strongly that there should be some permanent record left of a journey that was quite unique.

Until quite recently the very greatest difficulties were placed in the way of any foreigner who tried to penetrate the region which is bordered roughly on the west by the Caspian, on the north by Khiva and the Turkestan Desert, on the east by the great mountain walls of Afghanistan, Turkestan,

and India, and on the south by Persia and Afghanistan. From the time of the intrepid explorer Vambéry, who in 1863 visited Khiva, Bokhara, and Samarcand, disguised as a dervish, until the fall of Merv in 1881, travellers have visited these regions carrying their lives in their hands. After Vambéry came Marsh in 1872, then Valentine Baker in 1873, when the Transcaspian railway was only at Kizil Arvat. Captain Napier, Colonel McGregor, Burnaby, and, lastly, O'Donovan in 1879, all ran the greatest risks in visiting places where to-day the tourist is not only permitted but even welcomed. In the short space of eighteen years Russia has embraced in her iron grasp a territory that extends nearly 1000 miles from east to west and about 700 from north to south. Like a crab she has stretched out her great claws, and slowly but surely she has closed them from east and west till they met in Merv.

Wisely or unwisely, we have allowed Russia to take this responsibility on herself. Of the vast moral good that has resulted from her rule there can be no two opinions. Had she done nothing more than sweep out of existence the horrors of a vile and universal slave traffic, civilisation would

applaud. But, under the skilful administration of the officers of the Czar, before long the Saturnian age of Central Asia must return. An empire worthy of Timur or of Alexander is rising into existence.

That Merv could ever have been held by England seems to me quite absurd. Geographically the oasis does *not* belong to Afghanistan, *pace* some Russophobe writers on the subject. The true Russian frontier is a line of hills with a pass over them south of the oasis of Sarakhs, about 75 miles from Herat, which in its turn should be our frontier post. While we seem to be doing nothing but wage idle wars with hill tribes, our friends the Russians have almost, if not quite, completed their new line from Ashabad to the Sarakhs oasis! How much longer are we going to be found napping?

I said I claimed no merit for my book as a work of research, but I do claim for it that it may, without presumption, be entitled to rank, humbly indeed, with its more learned and stalwart predecessors, because it is probably the last of a series that has dealt with Central Asia as a sort of *terra incognita*. Beginning with the awful tragedies of Stoddart and Conolly, and going on with a long record of wild and thrilling adventure, of reckless bravery

and hairbreadth escapes, the end comes peacefully with a narrative of a "personally-conducted" tour!

J. T. WOOLRYCH PEROWNE.

LONDON, *July* 1898.

*** The author would here express his thanks to Miss Carey and the Hon. A. Capell for permission to use many of their photographs, and to Mr. Young, of Fradelle and Young, for the careful way in which he developed many of the author's own pictures, making it possible for them to be reproduced here.

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CHAPTER I

THE JOURNEY FROM CONSTANTINOPLE TO BATOUM

THERE is more than one way by which a traveller from England can reach the Caucasus, but undoubtedly the most interesting, if not the least expensive, is that *viâ* Vienna and Constantinople, proceeding by steamer from the latter place to Batoum, and on by railway. Of the two roads from Vienna to the capital of Turkey we chose the Costanza, preferring to run the risk of a troubled crossing from that port in order to gain the advantage of the sea approach to the Golden Horn. No city in the world probably suffers so much on a closer inspection as Constantinople. Whether it is approached from the Sea of Marmora or from the Bosphorus it looks enchanting in its beauty of

mosques and minarets, in its picturesque outline of city walls and of low houses, crowded together, rising one above the other, as the ground slopes back from the water which is animated with shipping and alive with caiques. But between the quay and the hotel what a revolution of feeling comes over one! Dirt, squalor, rags, mendicancy, the mangy dogs, the miserable tumble-down shanties that do duty for houses, the wretched streets and the various smells, all combine to disillusionise one only too soon.

It was by no means my first visit, but each time I see the place I like it less—even the bullet marks in the walls near the Ottoman Bank fail to add to one's interest. I well remember my first visit in October 1895, which took place about a week after the slaughter of the Armenians in Stamboul, and they showed me the place where the Turks had torn the palings from the garden enclosures with which they had battered in the heads of the helpless Armenians. Not that these latter were really helpless if my informant was to be believed, for these same Armenians, who had suffered like so many sheep, were well armed with pistols and knives with which they had been ostentatiously swaggering before the

Turks for days past. When the crisis came, they were too cowardly and too mean-spirited to defend themselves. I had the privilege on that occasion of dining with the two Special Correspondents of the *Times* and the *Daily News*, and their tales of horror and massacres hardly helped me to digest my dinner, but while admitting the atrocities of the Turks to the full, admitting, too, the direct intervention and positive orders of the Sultan, it seems to me quite incredible that the fault is all on one side, and I, for one, do not see why a nation so utterly debased as the Armenians should be raised, for mere political exigencies, to the pinnacle of hero-martyrs simply as a lever against another nation which has ten times more grit and manhood in it.

On Saturday, November 6, 1897, a party of twenty-five left the Pera Palace Hotel to proceed aboard the *Rossia* of the Russian Steam Navigation Company, bound for Batoum. We found her a comfortable boat for a tramp. She was English-built, though not a new boat, and all her cabins were quite aft, one being exactly over the screw! Our skipper was a jolly little man, who spoke English very well. The Directors of the Russian Steam Navigation Company showed themselves most

anxious to do all in their power to make things comfortable for us all through, and had arranged for the *Rossia* and her English-speaking skipper to take us to Batoum.

We were lucky in our weather—it being fairly smooth throughout our voyage, whereas, the week before, terrible storms had been raging and ships had been lying for days at the mouth of the Bosphorus not daring to venture out.

Sunday was a glorious day and we could see the coast, mountainous and wooded, about two miles off. Ineboli was our first stopping place, and we lay off it while boats came out with passengers and merchandise, among which were great sacks full of nuts, taking back cargoes, such as machinery and manufactured goods from England, to the shore in exchange, and all with the gesticulations and shoutings inseparable from Eastern methods of conducting business.

That they were a picturesque set goes without saying—the decks of our boat amidships were strewed with all sorts and conditions of them, better viewed from a respectful distance, which certainly lent enchantment to the view.

Not one of our places of call—Ineboli, Ordou,

Kerasounde or Trebizond—had a harbour. They are all open roadsteads, and bad at that, for if there is the least sea the steamers are obliged to proceed, taking their passengers with them, who then have a double disappointment of seeing their homes "fade o'er the water," and of looking forward to more weary hours of discomfort.

After leaving Ordou the little captain asked me if I was fond of apples. On my saying I was he went into his cabin and brought out what looked like an ordinary small-sized Blenheim Orange, but it was no ordinary fruit. It came from a small orchard in the interior which supplies the Sultan's table, and all the fruit thereof is supposed to go direct to Yildiz, and his Majesty will have these apples and none other. I naturally asked the captain how *he* came to have any. His reply was a wink and a knowing smile, and I proceeded to test the fruit in the usual way. In England we should not consider it anything extraordinary, but it was firm in flesh, juicy and sweet, and was certainly better than any apple I ate anywhere else on the tour.

We made quite a long stay at Trebizond, sufficient, that is to say, to enable most of us to go ashore. There is nothing of interest in

the town itself save its old walls, and it owes what little importance it now possesses to the fact that it is the starting-point for Erzeroum in the interior.

We left Trebizond on Tuesday night at 9.30, and arrived early next morning at Batoum after a voyage of eighty-seven and a half hours from the Golden Horn. As the distance is only seven hundred miles it will at once be seen that we did not travel express, even allowing for the stops. The Anatolian line is not considered to be worth more than a tramping service, and all the boats call from point to point between Batoum and Constantinople. Along the north shore of the Black Sea things are very different. The boats are much better, being more modern; the passengers are considered more, and there is an express service which only calls at the principal ports. The reason for this is presumably that the northern coast is wholly Russian, and that therefore every effort should be made to facilitate the movements of Russians travelling in their own country. Further, to some extent there is railway competition to be met, while the north coast of Asia Minor is a desert, so far as railways are concerned, and likely to remain so for some time to come.

We had persuaded the captain to get us into Batoum as early as possible, in order that we might have some time there for sight-seeing. He faithfully fulfilled his part by getting us there at 8 A.M., but sight-seeing was another matter. It was pouring in torrents, and it continued to pour in torrents without a break the whole of the day. With the exception of those of us who had to go to banks or transact other business, no one left the boat till after six, when we went to the best restaurant in the place for dinner. It was a poor place enough and was an index to Batoum itself, regarded architecturally, but our welcome was hearty. The hall had been decorated and a "Wellcome" in evergreens met the eye on entering and riveted our attention all the more because of its extra burthen of a letter. Of the food there was nothing to complain, and those who were in Russia for the first time had good opportunity of witnessing a splendid array of Zakuska or *hors d'œuvres*, which according to the custom of the country was spread on a side table with a variety of liqueurs to aid the digestion.

The band faltered out a "God Save the Queen," and we sat down to dine, though we were once

or twice interrupted by that same band which, besides playing the Russian National Anthem, gave us melodies of welcome in national style which necessitated speeches and health-drinking. At any rate we were in good state for the night journey to Tiflis when the time for departure came, and we found ourselves at the station—the most imposing building in Batoum.*

The Russians are not proud of the Caucasus railway, I do not mean from an engineering point of view, but from a travelling point of view. I agree with those who are of that opinion. When a carriage is labelled for thirty persons and only twenty can get in, there is something very wrong—especially when to house those twenty you have to pay for thirty tickets. This initial difficulty was overcome after we started by distributing our surplus population in other parts of the train by means of a judicious expenditure of a few roubles in the proper quarter.

I may here mention that on arrival at Batoum we had no difficulty with the Custom House, not one of our bags or boxes being so much as looked

* The fine Cathedral in course of erection is nearing completion, and in a year the station will be robbed of its proud pre-eminence.

at. This very unusual privilege was accorded to us, so we were informed, by the express command of the Governor-General at Koutais, and thus auspiciously we made our entrance into Russia.

CHAPTER II

BATOUM TO BAKU

THE returning dawn showed us an open country quite brown and bare, with the river Koura running by the side of the line. The train stopped for a few minutes at Mshket, which is also the last station on the post-road from Vladikavkas to Tiflis. We got a glimpse through the rain of the old Cathedral on the opposite side of the river, and learnt from our guide-books that this decayed old-world place was once the capital of Georgia; and then we were off again, and by 9.15 found ourselves not very much behind time at Tiflis. It is just as well not to be behind time there if you happen to have ordered your drosky, for the ishvosniks of Tiflis are entitled to charge for the wait, and the trains are

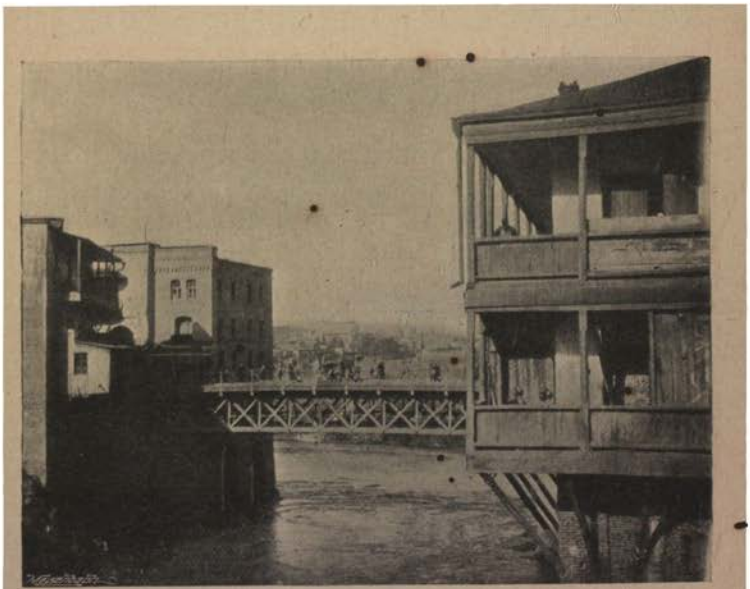
not unfrequently three or four hours behind time. As there are always plenty of droskies, it is therefore hardly worth the while to order one in advance.

We drove through the rain to the Hotel d'Orient —a ride of about twenty minutes through seas of white mud, which in places must have been at least two feet deep. It was a most depressing experience, but we found the hotel very comfortable and clean, and the rooms were large and lofty, and we looked forward with feelings of hope to our ten days' sojourn there.

The hotel is in the Russki Gorod, or Russian town, and exactly opposite the hideous new Byzantine erection called a Cathedral, while on the left, opposite, was the Palace of the Governor-General; on our left, alongside, the headquarters of the Military administration, and five minutes up the street on our right was the fine Opera House; so we were very central. From the windows looking north could be seen in fine weather the lofty peak of Kasbek rising, snow-capped, above his fellows.

Tiflis, though about 1500 feet above the sea-level, is not romantically situated. A high bare brown ridge shuts it in from the west. From this

ridge the ground runs east to the watercourse of the Koura, and again rises on the further side in an ugly brown bare slope, dotted with barracks and military store buildings, to low broken hill-tops;



BRIDGE OVER THE KOURA, TIFLIS

while south lies an open uninteresting plain; north, far away, rise the snow mountains of the Caucasus.

I had an idea that Tiflis was a kind of Berne or Interlaken, but it is far duller than either, and the heat in summer-time must be something terrible.

Of course we saw everything all along the route at the worst possible time of the year, and this we had always to bear in mind in making our estimate of the country.

WINE CART, TIFLIS

The interesting parts of the city lie to the south, where are the Georgian, Persian and Armenian quarters down by the gorge formed by the waters of the Koura, of which photographs are given.

The two characteristics of the place undoubtedly are the armourers' shops and the wine stores.

The former are full of all sorts of Persian and Caucasian weapons. Really fine work is very rare, but the modern work is good, and the imitation of the ancient excellent. They even take the trouble of burying their handiwork in the ground that it may have the appearance of the antique. I was told that we should find good and cheap armour further east, but this is an entire delusion, and Tiflis is the place to buy curios of this sort. I hunted for three days in the bazaars of Bokhara, and had very great difficulty in securing one coat of mail in fair order, a very inferior helmet, and a third-rate leather shield with all the bosses off. In Russian territory east of the Caspian it is forbidden to sell arms, so one is practically reduced to the native State of Bokhara.

The wine stores are the gloomiest of above-ground cellars, where no ray of light seems to penetrate. I went into two or three and found them the weirdest of places. They are all in the old town. Imagine a great chamber which you enter direct from the street, darkness being made only visible by a small lamp perhaps. You become dimly aware that huge, uncanny-looking forms seem piled one on top of the other, all around you, one of which perhaps seems to have partially

collapsed. These are bullock skins, with their stumpy legs sticking out here and there, and the one that was half collapsed has had some of its vinous entrails withdrawn through a leg stump, which is now tied up with string! It surprised me to learn that these skins were worth, when full, from £20 to £30, because the wine is of the commonest.

At the other end of the town there has just been built a new wine store, where the handling of the wine is done scientifically, the bottling being very carefully effected and an even temperature maintained in the cellars. The manager was most courteous when we paid a visit there, and we tasted three or four bottles of excellent vintage before we left. In the judgment of the majority they were quite equal in flavour and colour to the better wines of the Rhine and Bordeaux. The district which gives its name to the Caucasian wine is Khaketia, and the only complaint one has to make against these wines is that they are very strong.

On Sunday we had the opportunity of seeing an Ordination service in the old Cathedral of Sion. The Archimandrite sent us a special invitation to be present, and we enjoyed the privilege of witnessing

one of the gorgeous ceremonies of the Greek Church. The music was very fine, but one choir was superior to the other, and the effect was thus slightly marred; but those who heard a service of the Eastern Church for the first time could not help being very much impressed.

I have more than once heard the Imperial and Metropolitical choirs together in the Alexander Nevski in Petersburg, but the singing of the better of the two choirs in the Sionski Sobor in Tiflis was very little inferior to the best I have heard in the capital.

The most stately service of the Roman Church falls far short, to my mind, of the magnificence one witnesses in the splendour of the Eastern rite, and the spectator who has witnessed functions in Rome, Seville and Moscow cannot fail to be far more impressed with the dignity, reverence, stateliness and orderliness which characterise the Eastern Church than he is with all the theatrical pomp of Rome.

While on the subject of churches and services, there is one ecclesiastical building in Tiflis worthy mention. In the photograph which shows the modern Cathedral there may be seen a white building on the left clinging to the side of the hill. This

is a monastery with two churches, one not yet finished. It is said that they owe their existence to material brought up thither by young girls about to be married or recently married, who by this pious

NEW CATHEDRAL, TIFLIS

pilgrimage hope to earn a life of married happiness. In the course of years other churches will, I suppose, spring from the mountain side; meanwhile, the one church finished and the half-church growing show the strength of the popular superstition, and the tombs of the wealthy, who pay heavily to lie

under the shadow of these buildings, add an additional sanctity to the spot.

The Opera-house is one of the most imposing buildings in Tiflis, and inside it is handsomely decorated, the *foyer* being in the Arabesque style. We certainly did not expect, however, to hear the music and singing we did. It was quite first-rate, and so were the costumes and the stage properties; and there being no counter-attraction, not even a music-hall, we went no less than five nights, and enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. The municipality subsidises the company, and pretty heavily I should say, for the seats are cheap. Eleven roubles for a six-chaired box is not prohibitive.

On the day following our arrival we were invited to a reception given in our honour at the Persian Consulate-General by Nasrullah Khan, who was returning from London, where he had represented the Shah at the Jubilee. He speaks English very well, having been at Oxford, and he intends educating his own son in England. He was very interested in hearing of our proposed journey, and asked us why we did not come to Persia? Some one suggested there were no railways and no hotels, and no roads either to speak of, but he himself pro-

mised to be our guardian and protector; and I feel sure that any party travelling in Persia would have a most enjoyable time if he took the matter up. He left for Teheran a day or two later, but we had the pleasure of the Consul-General dining with us on the eve of our departure. He drank our health in water, saying he would not apologise for so doing as it was not anything but a compliment to do so in a beverage given us by the good God. After dinner the Cossacks of the Terek regiment sang to us and danced.

Singing is much encouraged in the Russian army. I do not know whether all the regiments have singing men like these Cossacks of the Terek—I should think they were an exception. They had a marvellous repertoire and they sang in harmony without note or book; their expression was very good, now pianissimo, now forte, now staccato, now sostenuto. Their characteristic songs seemed to be short, crisp, almost jerky melodies that ended in a snap. The dancing was not so varied as their singing. It generally took the form of one man at a time entering the circle, with one arm outstretched and the other folded across the chest. He would then to the accompaniment of his comrades' monotonous

chant move round the circle with a gliding motion, keeping his body still the while and upright—or he would dance crouched low on his hams. Occasionally two would dance together, and as I understood it, one acted the suitor and the other the bashful maiden—the latter holding the sleeve of his coat before his eyes. This allegory I have seen also—only in a much fuller degree—in a dance of the fellaheen outside Jerusalem.

It is difficult to describe a dance, but it is easy to enjoy watching it if it is graceful, and we soon learnt to beat a sort of time by clapping our hands to the cadence of the music of the chant. The characters of the dance never varied whenever we saw the Cossacks dance, so this attempt at a description will hold good for the rest of this book. Our first introduction to these singing and dancing Cossacks was at a picnic on the heights to the south of Tiflis. It was very cold as we sat in our verandah—but with the Colonel of Police at table we took courage and enjoyed our zakuska and cold meats and Kakhetin wine, while the band of the Nijni-Novgorod Dragoons played at intervals and the Terek Cossacks sang and danced. Many were the toasts drunk after lunch, and we then heard for the

first time the Russian equivalent to our "Auld lang syne" or "For he's a jolly good fellow," a refrain

SINGING COSSACKS OF THE TEREK

that is invariably played after a toast has been drunk.

A diversion was created on this particular occasion by the Cossacks surrounding me and "chairing"

me on high—it was very uncomfortable, but it was meant as a compliment and I took it as such.

Some of us had an opportunity of finding out the cost of clothes in Tiflis—an opportunity, let me say, that we were far from desiring, but as we had lost every registered box and portmanteau at Vienna on the way out, a little shopping became an absolute necessity. Considering the fact of the whereabouts of Tiflis the shops are very good and quite up to date; but the prices are high and purchasing is conducted under difficulties if you don't happen to be a Russian scholar, or if a guide is out of the question, as he of course is occasionally, when a lady wants to complete her wardrobe. For gentlemen's requirements everything seemed to come from Germany, and you bought your goods with the lead Custom seal still dangling. A fresh dress suit cost me £11, and I was lucky to find an old so-called model of Poole which fitted me fairly for the coat.

The day before we left Tiflis we were joined by Captain B., who arrived from Vladikavkáz by the Dariel Pass. He had had a rather exciting experience, having been snowed up five days in Vladikavkaz,

and he was the first to come down as soon as the road had been cleared, getting in even before the post, thanks to his having made friends with a Russian officer who was carrying despatches from

OLD TOWN, TIFLIS

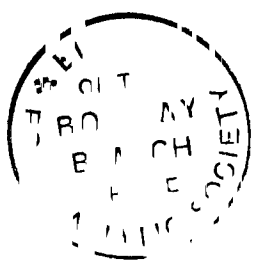
Petersburg. But such a journey on a thing no bigger than a toboggan could only be undertaken by a strong man, for the cold must have been intense, let alone the tremendous fatigue of travelling for hours on so uncomfortable a thing as a toboggan-sleigh.

We were told it was an exceptional thing that so early in the season the Dariel Pass should be blocked, but it is undoubtedly by far the best method of getting to Tiflis, as the scenery is equal to any Alpine Pass, and is by some thought to be as fine as anything in the world. Owing to the weather being so bad no expedition was made by any of us further than Mshket, the former capital of Georgia and the first station on the route from Tiflis.

Ten days is more than enough for Tiflis, and none of us was sorry to take a seat for the next stage in our journey to Baku, a long stretch of nineteen hours.

I tried to find out before leaving when Tiflis was at its best. It seems that spring-time is a satisfactory season of the year. Otherwise summer is frightfully hot, winter wretchedly cold, and autumn generally unhealthy. Anyhow I cannot believe that at any season of the year it can be beautiful, and any idea of trying to make it a resort for Europeans seems sheer madness, at any rate at present. Perhaps when one of the six foreign companies that have for years past been trying to get a concession for the lighting of Tiflis by

electric light has triumphed, a new era will dawn on the capital of the Caucasus, ushered in with —let us hope the English Company's—electric light.



CHAPTER III

BAKU AND THE CASPIAN

THE journey from Tiflis to Baku is not an interesting one. Taught by experience, we had secured two special carriages for our party, which gave us ample room and to spare. We started in a regular gale, which, luckily, we had behind us. The dust was driven in lofty columns before us, and all sorts of stray objects, such as camel-grass, accompanied us, bumping along the ground and rolling over and over, till brought to a standstill by a fence or house.

Far away on our right were the mountains of Khorassan, the borderland of Persia and Armenia, and on our left rose, a lofty wall, the mountains of Daghestan. The near and middle distance on either

side was dull uninteresting brown land, with here and there a town, a village, or a lonely house. We lunched at Akstafa, whence a road leads to Ararat and Erivan. The former was about seventy miles away; but the season was too late for climbing, or, indeed, for travelling anywhere out of the beaten track, unless of necessity.

As the sun went down we enjoyed a glorious sunset effect on the mountains of Daghestan, whose picturesque crests, bathed in roseate glow, were thrown into strong relief against the sky-line, while their sides seemed all the darker because of the long low steppe which, inky-black, screened their base from view.

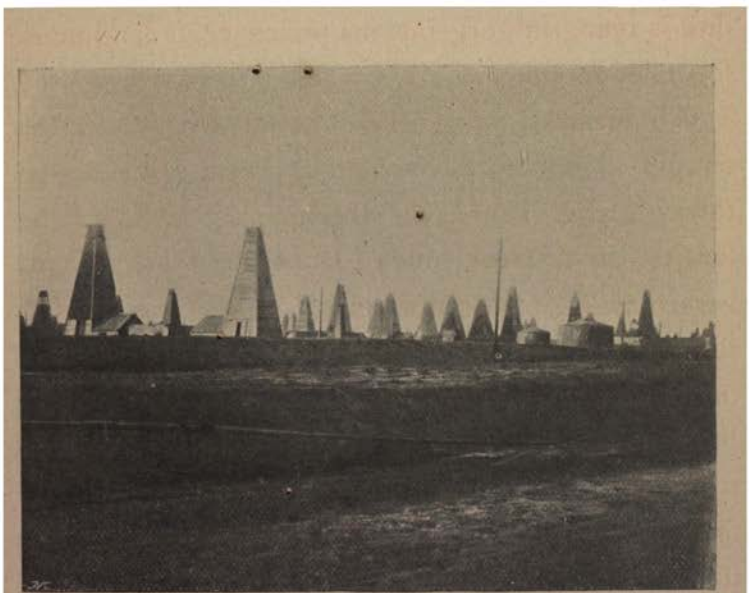
The line from Batoum to Baku is a single one, and at every station one crosses long petroleum-tank trains going to the Black Sea port. There is a scheme afoot to lay pipes the whole distance and so save the railway rates; but, naturally, there is some little difficulty in getting the necessary concession for this, as the chief revenue of the railway must come from these tank-trains.

If the railway-station at Batoum is one of the architectural glories of the town, the same may with greater truth be said of the station of Baku;

only in the latter town there are buildings of interest dating from before the Russian occupation, which lend an interest which is wanting in Batoum, while, as at Batoum, the inevitable Byzantine Cathedral is rising in gorgeous magnificence, a land-mark for miles round.

We steamed into Baku about 6 A.M. in the struggling light of a November dawn. We passed through what looked in the ghostly light to be forests of fir-trees, and I thought that perhaps here was a town with sea, cliff, and woods, but these notions faded with the rising sun. Baku in the glare of daylight is a dismal place: the buildings are mean, the streets very bad, and the surrounding country dispiriting to a degree. Our fir-trees turned out to be the conical wooden erections put up over the naphtha-wells to prevent a "fountain" wasting its precious contents by watering the neighbouring acres. They also contain the derricks which support the boring and pumping gear. There are hundreds of these all round Baku, and at a distance they look exactly like trees. We had the good luck to witness one of these "fountains" on the day of our arrival. The Anglo-Russian Petroleum Company had "struck ile," and

a spout began which was still running three weeks later on our return. In old days a fountain was a double nuisance. The unlucky owner had to pay all sorts of damages for injuring his neighbours'



DERRICKS OVER OIL-WELLS, BAKU

property, and he at the same time lost thousands of gallons of precious stuff. By building these conical wooden chimneys over a well, the spout is at least confined, and the only thing to do is to try to save as much as possible. Of course, preparations are always made in case a "fountain"

bursts out, but rarely does it happen that the first rush can be properly coped with. It is far more profitable to have no fountains and to rely on pumping. But for a detailed and most interesting account of Baku and its oil the reader is advised to see Charles Marvin's "The Region of Eternal Fire."

About nine miles away from the town of Baku is the Balakhani-Saboontchi plateau, the principal oil-producing area of Baku, and a visit to the wells there is incumbent on every traveller who would study the subject of Russian petroleum. There are, indeed, other oil-producing wells in other directions round Baku, but none so interesting both in point of number and antiquity. Balakhani can be reached either by carriage or train. We chose the former method, and after bargaining with our driver for five roubles, set off on our two hours' journey. Between Baku and Balakhani there is no road, only a cart-track, and a very bad cart-track too. Considering the fortunes made from the oil, one would have expected the oil-kings to have spent something on keeping a respectable carriage-road in repair between their wells and their dwellings in Baku, but they evidently think otherwise.

The country traversed is as bare as a billiard-

table and as rough as a mountain-side, and it is paying the highest possible compliment to the springs of our drosky to say that they emerged triumphantly from the task of carrying five persons over so cruel a course.

Nearing Balakhani one sees lakes of salt and of crude petroleum, interminable pipe-lines leading to Surakhani, where are the distilleries, reservoirs full of the precious liquid that means gold to English investors, disused watch-towers, formerly built to protect the pipe-lines from infuriated Tartar cart-drivers, whose gains were extinguished by the laying of these lines, and, last but not least, the forest of conical wooden erections built to cover the derricks erected over every naphtha-well.

Who visits oil-wells should have on his very oldest clothes—a coal-mine is nothing beside an oil-well and its surroundings. We were shown the working of one of the oil-pumps, and saw how the empty cylinder is let down the tube till it reaches the oil, and is then drawn up full of the black, greasy-looking stuff. When it reaches the surface it automatically discharges its contents and returns to the nether regions for another draught!

The Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to

Animals should establish a branch at Baku. I witnessed the grossest cruelty inflicted on some poor horses who could not move a very heavily loaded cart containing iron machinery on that villainous road. We tried to get across to Surakhani but found that, with the limited time at our disposal, it would take too long, so we perforce returned the same way we had come.

Until a few years ago there was a remnant left of the old Zoroaster fire-worship at Surakhani, near Cape Apsheron, but the last priest was little better than a fraud, who lived on the charity of the curious, and now the temple is deserted, and the cult, founded over 2500 years ago, which drew thousands of pilgrims annually from India, flickered out in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Oil is, of course, the motive power of everything out here: engines on the railway—and very curious some of them are, with a funnel at each end and the cab in the middle—steamers on the Caspian and Black Seas—machinery in the towns. As might be expected, the streets are lit by oil lamps, though electricity will soon take its place—in Tiflis and Baku, at any rate.

Apart from oil there is little to interest the

AN OIL FOUNTAIN, BAKU.

traveller in Baku. If he is there in very dry weather he will find the streets being "watered" with petroleum, and in the hotels (?) his food may be flavoured therewith. He will also, if an obser-

PERSIAN WALLS, BAKU

vant person, be struck by the very fashionably dressed ladies whom he sees driving about. These are the wives and daughters of the oil kings, who are supplied with Parisian glories—confections is, I believe, the right word—regardless of cost.

He will notice, too, the curious carts of the natives—narrow things on high wheels and painted like the Sicilian carts, which indeed they closely resemble.

He will visit, of course, the old Persian town with its perfect walls, and look at the remains of the Arabesque architecture of the great arched portico of the old mosque. He will stroll through the bazaars and buy turquoises, which are here plentiful and cheap, and lamb-skins, which are not particularly cheap or plentiful and are better bought further east. And as he approaches the harbour to go on board he cannot fail to be struck by the enormously massive tower, about a hundred feet high, of curious shape, which stands close to the water. This is the "Tower of the Maiden." The story goes that some Khan of Baku, in days of yore when Baku was Persian, tried to force his daughter to a hateful union. She gave a reluctant consent on condition that he would build this tower. When it was finished she climbed to the top and threw herself down. The tower is now used as a signalling station. Romance went out in 1801 when the Russians came in.

In determining the date of our tour I had been

influenced by my Russian agent, who informed me that November and December were excellent months for visiting Central Asia. So they proved to be in our case, as we had unbroken sunshine almost the whole of our stay east of the Caspian, and indeed for the whole of our journey from Constantinople to Sevastopol, if two bad days at Batoum and Tiflis be excepted. But I discovered that we were quite a month too late—every one said that it *ought* to have been raining the whole time. A special journey, however, it is only right, should have special weather, so we took sunshine as our due, and though it was often very cold in the night—the temperature would make a difference of over twenty degrees on my Reaumur thermometer during the space of twelve hours—our well-warmed carriages protected us from all discomfort from this cause.

The boat which took us across the Caspian was the *Admiral Korniloff* of the Caucasus and Mercury Company. She was better than I expected, and with the exception of her deck passengers, a motley and weird crowd, and an enterprising colony of black beetles in the second-class cabins, she was a very clean boat. Being so many we had to occupy

second-class cabins, which are quite as good as the first-class if you don't object to beetles!

We sailed on Monday afternoon, November 22, having slept on board the previous night, and in the course of over thirty hours seen all the sights of Baku, which included in my case the Post Office, one of the worst places of its kind I have ever come across. It is a collection of miserably small rooms which are always crammed with evil smelling Russians and Tartars of the lowest class. As a window is never open and the doors are double and a stove is kept perpetually stoked up to bursting point, the atmosphere is a curiosity that cannot be equalled anywhere outside Russia. One positively chokes on going in, and then one has to fight and struggle to the counter, only to find that it is the wrong room, and the struggle and fight begin again to get out, and one enters another room, managed on exactly the same principles. Why don't the Russian officials die of it? Well, perhaps they do; the Government may think it quickens promotion. I am not sure what advantage the Russian P.O. offers to the children of the Great White Czar. I do not mean the official side, but the public side of the counter; but certain it is that a Russian P.O.

is a safe draw for evil smells belonging to the persons of these children, who come there, perhaps, for the warmth—who knows?

Our eighteen hours crossing was uneventful. The usual per-centage was ill owing to a curious kind of swell, but there was not a wave to be seen, though the Caspian is much subject to storms, being 84 feet below the level of the Black Sea. The first view of the east side of the Caspian was, however, enjoyed by all, as we had come into lake-like water between eight and nine, with low islands on right and left, harbingers of mainland. Our minds were so full of Central Asia that the Caspian, apart from its weather conditions, hardly got its full share of attention from us. But is it not remarkable that this inland sea produces in its limited area such widely different sorts of life as the herring, the seal, the salmon, and the sturgeon? How many people, too, are aware that from the bladder of this last-named fish comes that common domestic article known to us as isinglass? But *à nos moutons.*

Krasnovodsk lies in an amphitheatre of picturesque hills, evidently of volcanic origin and absolutely bare. The town itself is a mere collection of mean little one-storied, flat-roofed houses.

The piers are wooden, while here as elsewhere all along the line the railway station is *the* architectural feature of the place. All these stations have a strong family likeness. They are built of white stone and have invariably a fountain in the cab-yard, which on state occasions is made to play. It is evidence of the strong faith of the Russians in their destiny that they should have built fountains in the waterless desert, which by means of irrigation they are now rapidly reconverting into the smiling gardens of centuries ago.

Hardly were we made fast to the pier when three Russian officers came on board. They were the Commandant of Krasnovodsk, Colonel Brunelli of the Railway Engineers, and Mons. W. de Klemm, the Resident Political Agent at Ashabad.

CHAPTER IV

KRASNOVODSK AND GEOK-TEPÈ

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL KOUROPÀTKINE, Governor-General of the Transcaspian Province, since promoted to be Minister of War in Petersburg, had sent his officers to meet us on our arrival in his Government, and in his name they bade us "Welcome," and asked in true hospitable fashion how we felt after our crossing and our long journey from England. We were glad to give a good report of ourselves, and in compliance with his special request wired our reply to Ashabad, the capital of the Province and the residence of the Governor.

Our spirits had risen at this hearty reception, and we hurried to the station close at hand to inspect

our special train, which was to be our home for eighteen days. Some of us, especially the ladies of the party, had been anticipating all sorts of hardships and inconveniences, and we were all not only relieved but delighted when we saw how relatively comfortable we were to be.

There were three carriages, each containing four compartments capable of being converted into four beds, or sixteen beds to every carriage. Though not so comfortable as the Wagon-lit Company's cars, they were yet comfortable enough, especially as there were in each four-berth compartment only three gentlemen or two ladies. We had to bring our own sheets and pillows and towels—only a mattress was provided. These cars are labelled second-class, there being no first, as it is a military railway. Then there were three saloon carriages. One carried M. de Klemm and Colonel Brunelli, another—General Kouropatkine's private car—was occupied by my wife and me, and the third was the private car of the late General Annenkoff, whose name is inseparably connected with the building of the line.

These three saloon cars are built more or less on the same lines, so a description of one will suffice

RAILWAY STATION, KRASNOVODSK,
Our Special Train ready to start.

for all three. And first, for the information of those who do not know Russian railways, I must say that the gauge is much wider than ours, and that therefore the carriages are more roomy. Nearly one-third of the saloon I am describing is taken up with a sitting-room, upholstered in morocco. Leading from this is a two-foot passage at the side, in which is a door opening into the bedroom. This is a cabin six foot by seven and contains a bed, a large writing-table with drawers, a mirror, and a ship's washing arrangement—a very snug little room, though we found the bed somewhat narrow. The passage leads on to three more doors—one opens into the attendant's cabin, which is next to the bedroom, opposite which is a bath-room with hot and cold water, while beyond, on the attendant's side, is the heating apparatus. Electric bells are fitted throughout.

But to go on with the train. There was a baggage-car, a dining-car (this only held eighteen persons, so we had to double all the meals), a kitchen-car, a hospital-car with surgeon complete (for we are on a military railway), a servant's car, and finally an observation car at the rear. There was free communication from front to rear of the

train, so that no one was tied to his own carriage, and all could circulate freely.

I have said nothing about our food. This is always an interesting subject and one on which I am invariably questioned. We had to content ourselves with the usual *café complet* for breakfast. Our luncheon commenced with a limited zakuska, though the most excellent fresh caviare was always obtainable, and this compensated for much with some of us, though it hardly appealed to the ladies. We tried the celebrated white caviare too, but I think on the whole that the green is preferable. It is a great pity that in England we never get the fresh caviare, but the distance is great and the cost even of the so-called fresh caviare is very high. In Odessa I bought a pound to bring home, as I was coming direct, and I paid over eight shillings there for it, and a pound does not go very far. Two hot "plates" followed. Dinner was the same, with two extra courses and coffee. The cooking was very fair, considering the material at hand for our *cordon bleu!* Soup was always good of its kind—if you liked a rather rich cabbage-soup—and sturgeon was nice till the novelty wore off, and then we began to criticise it, and found it too much like veal.

Meat is a great difficulty in Central Asia: there practically is none, from an English butcher's standpoint. What we had was always tough and tasteless. Game was acceptable under the circumstances. Pheasants, however, like the sturgeon, became monotonous after a time. I think the Russians are in sore straits to know what to eat *là-bas*, and, if one may judge from the suppers and lunches at which we were entertained so hospitably, they live on pheasants and an occasional sheep. Fish they never see from one year's end to another—sturgeon excepted. I suppose as irrigation is reintroduced the quality of the meat will improve; but the only spot where the meat is as poor is Jerusalem, and perhaps it it not saying too much if I give the palm to the Holy City for badness. Central Asia, in any case, comes very close behind.

My friendly informant with whom I discussed the above details told me further that the domestic servant question is very acute—quite as acute as the negro question, let us say, in America. His tone was almost pathetic as he recorded his troubles. He assured me that he was reduced to diplomatic relations between himself and his household, This was good, as he was by profession a diplomatist.

His wife, however, was not always so mindful of the thin ice, and one of these servants had actually stopped short in the middle of her cooking and walked straight out of the house, cheerfully forfeiting thereby anything due to her in the shape of wages, knowing full well she would get a place next door. In fact, the servants are the masters of the situation. The natives don't make servants at all, it appears, and for some reason Persians, who are excellent servants, do not fill the blank. The Russians may well envy the Anglo-Indian in this respect.

Krasnovodsk (meaning Red Sea), though the Russians occupied it in 1869, has only been the terminus of the Transcaspian Railway since October 1896. Before that time, Ouzoun Ada, some distance to the south, was the terminus, and before that again Mikhailovsk. But Ouzoun Ada had to be abandoned because of the shallowness of the water. Whereas at Krasnovodsk there are twenty-seven feet at the quay head, at Ouzoun Ada there were only twelve.

The change of port makes the line longer by about seventy versts or forty-six miles.

We left Krasnovodsk about 3 P.M. in the after-

noon, having had time for a hasty luncheon and a cursory inspection of the distillery where sea-water is turned into fresh. Few of us, I am afraid, recalled the historic fact that here were the head-quarters of the Russians in 1877 when they first tried conclusions with the Turkmans. Here the defeated Lomakine stood a siege of seven weeks from the pirates he had been sent to crush. So bold had these marauders become, that they had provoked the anger of the Czar by leaving their deserts and taking to the Caspian in pursuit of plunder. Now, the Caspian is a Russian lake, and though the whole of the south end is Persian territory, yet the Shah may not even launch a merchantman on its waters! Piracy, therefore, was a direct challenge to the double-headed Eagle, and this it was that gave the excuse for a descent into Central Asia in the year 1877, or exactly twenty years before our arrival.

Having escaped from the seemingly unbroken semicircle of hills round Krasnovodsk, we followed the line of the coast for three hours—till, in fact, the light failed. The water on this particular afternoon was the colour of the brightest emerald, and rocky headlands and islands stood out in

bold relief to right and left, bathed in wondrous purple light, while animation was lent to the scene by a solitary fishing-boat with white sail gleaming in the western sun, and by myriads of wild fowl darkening the surface of the waters of the Balkan Bay.

On our left, a great brown expanse! our first glimpse of an Asian desert—not sand here, but a kind of argillaceous substance, stretching ahead as far as the eye could see, but bounded on the north at a distance varying from a half to one mile by the long low range of the Great Balkans—brown too —which terminates in the promontory of Krasnovodsk.

We enjoyed our tea *à la Russe* on the observation car and began to make the acquaintance, which ended in a sincere friendship, of our Russian *attachés* Mons. de Klemm and Colonel Brunelli, who, by the kindness and courteous forethought of General Kouropatkine, were to accompany us throughout—the former, who speaks English perfectly, as guardian of our personal comfort and well-being, and the latter as captain of the train and all appertaining thereto. Need I say how admirably they fulfilled their tasks, and how much we owe

to both of them, and to Mons. de Klemm especially, for making our stay in Central Asia the pleasant and interesting experience it was?

The darkness closed in, all too soon, a little before six, and the country through which we were passing became blotted out. During the night we travelled through a desert country, and entered the Oasis of Akhal-Tekke. The desert in Central Asia is of two sorts, the sandy waste and the alluvial desert. The latter only wants water to make it fertile—though occasionally there are signs of a saline deposit observable. Most of our road so far had lain through the alluvial desert. With the first streak of light we saw that there were occasional signs of cultivation, and water was in evidence.

At 9.30 in the morning the train stopped close to the enormous mud walls of what was evidently a disused fort. We rightly guessed that this was the famous Geok-Tepè, the last stronghold of the Tekke-Turkmans, when they were almost annihilated by the Great White General, Skobeleff.

When the train came to a standstill at the platform we found about forty Turkmans drawn up to receive us, headed by their *starshina* or head man. This latter was apparelled most gorgeously in cloth

of gold, while the others wore the usual dress of the Turkmans, namely, a long sort of dressing-gown of a dull red with small black stripes, high leather boots, and the great sheepskin hat. Some

TEKKE-TURKMANS AT GEOK-TEPÈ

of these men wore medals won in the service of their conquerors, and some there were present who had been in the fort when it was taken, and were fortunate enough to escape with their lives.

I have no desire to moralise, but who could fail

to be struck with the fact that under orders from General Kouropatkine these fierce warriors who had held the power of Russia at bay for three campaigns, and written a Plevna large in the history of Central Asia, should be drawn up on a railway platform within a stone's throw of their great ruined stronghold to do honour to a handful of English tourists? Strange are the whims of Dame Fortune. And though I was human enough to photograph these men, I was also human enough to be sorry for them, paraded for our benefit, intensely interesting though it was to see them.

Presently we were introduced to Colonel Folbaum of General Kouropatkine's headquarters staff. This officer had been sent from Ashabad to meet us on purpose to explain the siege to us, and we at once followed him across the railway, and after a walk of three minutes found ourselves on the top of the wall of the fortress at its south-west angle. We were then enabled to get some idea of a Turkman stronghold. Inside the walls of this one there was room for forty thousand men with their *kibitkas* or tents, their families, camels, horses, and cattle. The walls, about thirty feet in height, have a thickness at the base of

thirty-five feet, and an average thickness of twenty-five feet on the top. Towers or the remnants of towers occur at intervals, and there were no fewer than twenty-one gateways. The whole, an enormous oblong of more than two and three-quarter miles in circumference, is built entirely of the clayey soil of the oasis, and formed an excellent protection against the sixty-nine cannons of the Russians, which practically made no effect at all, as the balls and shells simply buried themselves in the thickness of the ramparts. On the north-west outside the walls rises the mound which the Tekkes used as a post of observation. The final attack was made on the south-east face near the angle, and was only effected by a mine explosion—a form of warfare not understanded of the Tekkes. Once inside, the Russians made short work of this fort. Eight thousand are said to have fallen on that day, January 24, 1881; four thousand women and children fell into the hands of the Russians, twelve thousand more died during the siege, and the rest of the forty thousand escaped. The Russians only lost a small handful in comparison of their enemies, but then the total force employed was less than fifteen thousand.

Whatever we may think of this wholesale

slaughter, it answered in the end, for the Turkmans were thoroughly cowed, and the necessity for further bloodshed ceased from this time forward.

What does this brave marauding force now? They form part and parcel of the Russian army in Central Asia, under the name of Turkman militia—a splendid force, of whom we shall presently see something more at Ashabad and Merv.

The arts of peace now flourish by the side of the great mud walls. A little stream flows along the west face of the fortress, and on this is a cotton mill with English machines at work: eighty thousand pouds * of cotton annually are turned out from this mill alone; the total export from Central Asia lies between four and six millions of pouds, and Russia takes it all. The indigenous cotton plant is giving way gradually to the better sort from America.

We crossed the great enclosure from west to south, picking up pieces of broken shell and bits of bones, and passed out over the breach made by the Russians, sending up as we did so several coveys of partridges, and a string of stately camels filed

* A poud equals about 36 lbs. A million pouds, therefore, means nearly 17,000 tons.

through going in the opposite direction. Outside were the remains of the Russian trenches, and beyond them the cross-capped mound beneath which the Russian dead lie buried.

As we strolled back to the station I inquired about the celebrated Turkman horses, and was told they were practically extinct, because they were only of use to "brigands," whose occupation was now gone! "Where do the horses come from now?" "Khiva," was the reply, "for there you can get a breed that are good for draught." Still, the reply did not quite satisfy me, because every one in Central Asia must ride, and cavalry will always be largely used on those level plains, and what was so useful for brigands would be equally useful for Cossacks, and the breed might well have been thought worth preserving.

When Geok-Tepè fell the railway had only reached Kizil Arvat on the edge of the Akhal Oasis; it was then pushed on to Ashabad, which was made the capital of a Russian province, subordinate to Tiflis at first, but now, of course, quite independent, to which the name Transcaspia was given.*

* Now (consequent on General Kouropatkine's promotion) this is

KRASNOVODSK AND GOEK-TEPÈ

It will not be out of place to say here that the railway from Krasnovodsk to Samarcand is a military railway, under the control of the Minister of War in Petersburg, whose local representative is the Governor-General of Transcaspia. No foreigner is allowed on it except by special permission from Petersburg. It goes through the protected State of Bokhara, where, however, the line itself and a certain distance on either side are Russian territory, and beyond Bokhara it is in Turkestan, in the government of the Governor-General at Tashkend, but nevertheless the Governor-General of Transcaspia remains supreme controller as far as Samarcand.

These interesting details were forthcoming as we steamed towards Ashàbad, where we arrived about noon, having expressed our heartiest thanks to Colonel Folbaum for his lucid explanations of the events which took place at Geok-Tepè nearly seventeen years ago.

again changed, and the whole of Central Asia is under one Government whose seat is at Tashkend.

CHAPTER V

ASHABAD

On arrival at Ashabad out first duty was to General Kouropatkine, and in anticipation thereof all the gentlemen of the party were in evening dress when the train came to a standstill. Baron Korff, one of the General's aides-de-camp, was on the platform waiting to escort us to the residence of the Governor-General, and we lost no time in following him in droskies which were ready waiting for us.

As we tore through the streets, wide and planted with avenues of trees, I wondered what sort of a man we should find in General Kouropatkine, Fresh as we were from Geok-Tepè, we could not forget that we were about to call on Skobeleff's

Chief of Staff—one who had as much to do with that siege as Skobeleff himself—perhaps it would not be too much to say that Kouropatkine's was the brain that directed and Skobeleff's the hand that delivered the blow. The following brief sketch of Kouropatkine's* career from the *Times* of Jan. 19, 1898, may well be quoted at this point.

General Alexei Nicolaievitch Kuropatkin is only forty-nine years of age. He began active military service in Central Asia in the first Turkestan Rifle battalion, and received his "baptism of fire" at the storming of Samarkand in 1868. He also took part in the expedition against Khokand, the present Russian Ferghana, under General Skobeleff in 1875, and against the Turkomans at the capture of Geok-tepè in 1885. His name became inseparably connected with that of the heroic White General, whose chief of staff he was, both in the latter part of the Khokand campaign and at the hard-fought battles before Plevna and Loftcha during the war with Turkey, 1877–1878. The two characters balanced each other admirably. The perfectly cool and stoical nature of Kuropatkin was a great contrast to the sensitive and highly-strung nervous temperament of Skobeleff. Kuropatkin has been twice wounded, once severely in the left shoulder while crossing the Balkans in 1878, and again in the arm by Kara Kirghiz nomads while crossing the Tianshan mountains to Kashgar in 1876 on a diplomatic mission to the once famous Yakub Beg. He also sustained a severe contusion in the head at Plevna on September

* I prefer to spell the General's name as he himself wrote it on his photograph, but I leave the *Times* extract intact.

12, 1877, by the explosion of an ammunition caisson while he was rallying his men in one of the redoubts just taken from the Turks. His strong constitution does not appear to have suffered much from these mishaps. He is, therefore, no carpet knight, and has probably had harder training and a greater average of practical experience than many of his predecessors in the important office of controlling the gigantic organisation of the Russian army, which now numbers nearly 900,000 men and costs the State 280 million roubles a year.

He served for several years on the grand staff as chief of the Asiatic section and coadjutor of General Obrutcheff in planning the defence of the Empire. As to his explorations, his forced marches across hundreds of miles of the desert wastes of Central Asia, and his experiences with French troops in Algeria—are they not written in his many published works? When he took over the administration of the new Transcaspian territory from General Komaroff eight years ago, the popular imagination pictured him as the man destined to command any possible expedition against India, but there is no reason to believe that he harbours any personal feeling of Anglophobia, as do so many of the present generation of Russian military and especially naval officers. Much improvement has been accomplished in the Transcaspian during his tenure of office there. One of his least commendable actions was to turn out all the Polish railway engineers, Persians, Armenians, and other unorthodox Russian subjects engaged on the line, and introduce real Russians in their places. Of the latter there are now over 6000 on the railway to Samarkand, besides troops. A dozen Russian churches and some thirty Russian schools have been established; a branch railway has been laid down to the Kushk, and a good road made through the Kopet Dag; the hybrid system of justice among the natives has been

reorganised, and the cultivation of cotton by the Turkomans has been raised to such a pitch that the annual production now reaches nearly 12,000 tons.

On entering the residence, an unpretentious one-storeyed building, we left our goloshes and hats and coats in the hall, and were ushered into a large room hung with arms of all sorts, many of them rare specimens of the engraver's art. Presently the General entered—not the commanding fire-eater I more than half expected, but a man of medium height, dark, with well-knit frame—with a small piercing eye and a pleasant expression on his face. He must have been the exact opposite of the dashing Skobeleff.

Any reader of character could see at a glance what manner of man was before him. Cool, determined, calculating, and cautious, he would rarely strike unless practically certain of the result, and then woe betide any one who would cross his path!

He received us as honoured guests, and after a brief stay in which he showed us the weapons on the walls and particularly the chains he had taken off a Persian slave, he conveyed to us the invitation of Madame Kouropatkine to be present at her reception in the evening, and we bowed ourselves out.

This man, one of Russia's most distinguished sons, more powerful than any English official in India, not even excepting the Viceroy, is paid the magnificent sum of £400 a year, which is the salary attached to his high office! But the government of Central Asia makes an annual call on the Imperial Treasury of an enormous sum every year. These newly acquired provinces of the Empire are very far indeed from paying their way—nor are they likely to do so for some time to come yet. It is wise, therefore, not to add to the burden by paying heavy official salaries.

This fact alone, of the heavy drain on Imperial sources from these Central Asian provinces, may calm the fears of English alarmists who think Russia is on the march to India. Russia has quite enough to do to manage her own affairs without having any desire to undertake so complex a task as the government of India—supposing for one moment she had ever wrested it from our grasp. At the present time her energies are directed, and lawfully directed, elsewhere.

I am quite willing to admit that Russia is advancing towards India in another sense—*not* to take it, but to get near enough to make herself a factor in any political problem as between herself and England.

No one can blame her for this. It is our vulnerable "joint in the harness," and if she can put the screw on us by threatening India it is a distinct point in her game with England in other quarters of the globe. Hitherto we have been out of Russia's arm's length; now, thanks to our own statesmen, she can always bring pressure to bear on a very inconvenient and sensitive spot.

If we had acted boldly and sagaciously in the first instance, the provinces of Central Asia now owing obedience to the Czar would be under the shadow of the Union Jack—there can be no two opinions on this point. What we now have to do is to make the best of the altered situation and not be caught napping again. English and Russians are bound sooner or later to "march" together in Asia: let our statesmen see to it that we have the stronger positions.

In diplomacy no one nation need believe anything another says, so we are not bound to take as final the Russian statement that they do not want India; but while it is hard to see what they want with it as a possession, it is very easy to see that they do want to have the open joint where they can insert the point of their spear.

We had a hurried lunch in the train, and immediately afterwards started off to work out the programme which had been arranged for our benefit. In the first place, the police had been given orders for picked droskies to be placed at our disposal—of course, at an extra cost!—and we certainly did not want for speed during our afternoon's round.

Ashabad is situated on the level plain at the foot of the Kopet Dagh, which is distant about eight miles away. This range, running north-east and south-west, rises from eight to eleven thousand feet above the sea level and forms a most picturesque background to the town. Those of us who had been in India at once saw the resemblance of the place to an ordinary Indian cantonment, the most marked differences being the absence of verandahs, which are universal in India. This characteristic is noticeable throughout the whole of Russian Central Asia. Quite a large European town has sprung up since the fall of Geok-Tepè, and the course of our ride will reveal what great things the Russians have done in the sixteen years they have been there.

Our first halt was at the new stone cathedral,

containing nothing of interest except a monument in marble to the memory of Alexander II. bearing the eikon of his patron saint, Alexander Nevsky. We were pointed out the standing place set apart for his Excellency the Governor—marked by a piece of brilliant carpet. There are no seats or pews in a Russian church.

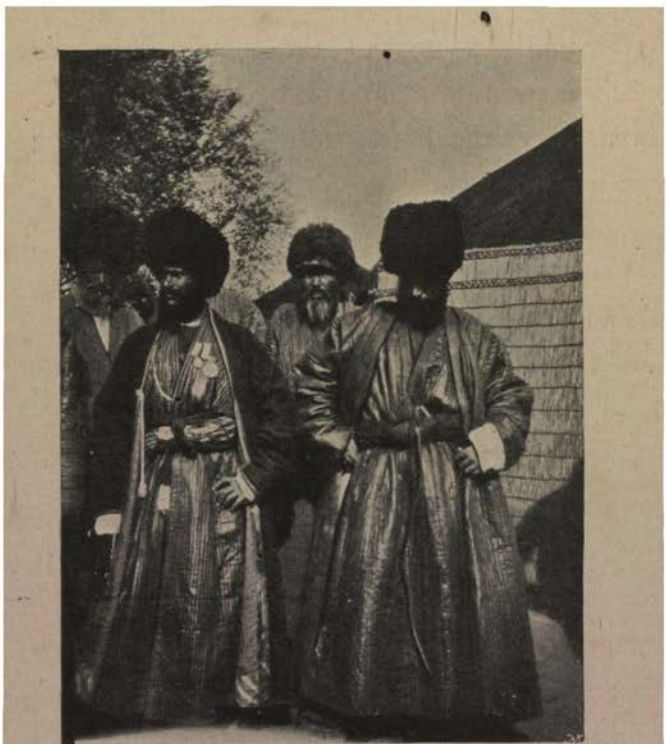
The school came next—a large, well aired, lofty-roomed building, surrounded by trees. We were told each scholar paid two pounds a year, and has to provide himself with two uniforms, one a parade dress coat of blue with nine silver buttons—somewhat similar to that of a London policeman—the other a sort of loose blouse; and trousers of grey material, which do duty with both uniforms. The school is free to all who care to pay, and the reason of the uniform is to reduce the children of the rich and poor to the same level in dress. We were ushered into the big hall, where the scholars were paraded by an officer, the priest, and a schoolmaster. Having duly fallen in, they struck up their National Anthem in harmony. Other songs followed, well executed, and then two violin and 'cello pieces. These were not quite so successful, and we finished with Peter the Great's Preobrajensky Hymn. In

honour of our visit the children received a whole holiday.

The Botanical Gardens occupied us next. They lie to the west outside the town. Our route lay over the wide plain, and four of our droskies raced abreast over the hard even ground. This expanse was evidently a cavalry exercising ground, for in one part it was covered with posts for Turks' heads, and with rings hanging from transverse beams. On our left near us were the Steppes, a swelling of the ground before the mountains proper beyond rise sheer out of the plain. Those who have seen the mountains of Moab will have a very good idea of the Kopet Dagh range. These mountains, by the way, are the boundary between Persia and Russia, but the range itself belongs to Russia. On our right stretched the limitless plain, dotted here and there with trees and kibitkas—a wonderful scene for those who now gazed upon it for the first time.

I am no botanist, and can say but little of a botanical garden from a technical point of view; but when I considered the place, and the time the Russians had been there, it seemed little short of marvellous that such a garden should be in such, evidently, advanced order. The buildings were full

of cases, the walls covered with maps and botanical cards. Outside the vine was being experimented



TYPES OF TURKMANS

with, and there was a large crop of cotton. Various fruit trees also we noticed undergoing critical examinations for future selections of the best sort. By bringing experiments such as these to a success-

ful issue, and by the help of scientific irrigation works, will the Government eventually make their Central Asian provinces remunerative instead of burthensome. When one remembers what vast empires, thriving cities, and dense populations these regions of old supported under good government—and a government too, it is well to remember, of very much the same character as the Russian, which, after all, is still more Eastern than Western—it is not difficult to see that by these peaceful arts Russia may again ere long rule over an Asiatic Empire as mighty as our own in India.

Our drive took us next to the Ashabad of the Tekkes, a town of mud walls, kibitkas, and a vast fortress of the Geok-Tepè type, with a great mound in the centre, used probably as a look-out. This place surrendered after the fall of Geok-Tepè. Water was flowing near in copious quantities. We halted to examine an encampment of Tekkés, now serving as militia in the Russian army. We entered one of the kibitkas or tents; they are circular dome-roofed structures, with a hole in the top for the smoke. The walls are about six feet high, and the circumference about twenty yards; the walls are of lattice-work inside, covered with reed matting on

the outside. The roof, supported by bent sticks, is covered with felt, which the Turkman women make. Hung round the walls of the kibitka were arms and accoutrements of various shapes and patterns, the only uniform thing being the Berdan rifle, which the Russian Government gives each militiaman. Everything else, including his horse, is the Turkman's private property. Thus have the Russians turned their warlike foes into a splendid ally, which costs them practically nothing beyond a rifle.

The fundamental difference between the English and the Russian method of treating conquered Easterns is this—the latter is one of absorption, the former one of class government. Any subject of the Czar can rise, and does rise, to the highest posts: he Russianises his name, that is all. Take one well-known instance, that of Alikhanoff. This man finished the work begun by Skobeleff, and became Governor of Merv before he was thirty-five. He was a Mohammedan of the Caucasus whose name was Ali Khan! Again, all the world knew that the great Loris Melikoff was not a Russian, but an Armenian. In India, on the other hand, no "native" can rise beyond a certain grade in either

the civil or military service. Which is the truer policy?

We emerged from our kibitka and once more mounted our droskies, noticing, as we crossed the

OUR ESCORT AT ASHABAD

open space in front of the kibitkas, a large hobby-horse under a shed, which is used, presumably, in the training of the Turkmans.

We were driven across the plain towards the steppe to see some new waterworks which are being executed to supply a town many versts away. All

that we saw on arrival were two or three holes in the ground, but one of the engineers present showed us the plan and explained to us the system of this manner of water supply. It appears it is the old Persian system, by which the water tapped in the hills is drawn off by means of underground channels, bricked or protected by wooden piles, with reservoirs at intervals, or sometimes merely a shaft, down which a bucket can be let into the channel below. It is an excellent system, because it secures two very important results in a country like the one we were visiting: it keeps the watercourse free from impurity, and it keeps the water cool, preventing evaporation.

Off once again across the plain, homeward bound now, till we struck the end of a long avenue, down which we dashed to the Technical Schools, where carpentering, turning, and iron work of all sorts were going on, and as the evening was now closing in and it was chilly, we lingered a few moments by the smithy fires. This technical school is intended to turn out artificers and builders for the railway, and one room was full of beautiful models and designs of all things appertaining to rolling-stock and permanent way made by the pupils themselves.

We were glad of the rest on our train before Madame Kouropatkine's reception. This began at nine, and we were all very punctual. Madame Kouropatkine makes a charming hostess, and quite won the hearts of the gentlemen by her grace of manner and sweet smile. The scene soon became a brilliant one as officer after officer came in, each covered with decorations. Every one wore uniform of some sort. I do not remember meeting one Russian in Central Asia out of uniform!

While strolling round the suite of rooms I suddenly came upon our Only Correspondent and our Only Military Man deep in the intricacies of an Indian frontier map with General Kouropatkine, and I gracefully retired from so formidable a council! Supper found me close to General Zerpitsky, the officer in command of the troops in Ashabad, and though his French is limited, we soon struck up an acquaintance. He is a *beau sabreur* of the old school, and a right good officer and comrade. French, by the way, is supposed to be a *passe partout* in Russia. This is a a popular fallacy. German is a better medium of conversation in Russia proper, and Central Asia is no exception to the rule; and ere long, I venture to

prophesy, English will be quite as useful a medium as French.

The supper was, needless to say, excellent. Cold sucking-pig was one of the *pièces de resistance*, and delicious pheasants, in all the glory of their gorgeous heads and tails, were another. Salads of fruit were a novelty which, personally, I took a liking to—though all did not approve of grapes in vinegar!

We finished the evening at the Bicycle Club, where a ball was going on, and some of the bolder spirits were shortly seen hopelessly entangled in the mysteries of a mazurka. When first a mazurka is unfolded before the eye of the uninitiated, the sense of bewilderment is overpowering. Only two things impress the beholder: one is that the men are always knocking their heels together—or rather their high boots, for the Russians do not wear heels in our sense of the word—and the other is that there is some one dancing who yells out what are apparently commands of some kind, and then change of figures takes place. Before I saw my last mazurka in Sevastopol I had got to admire it very much: not as a dancer, but as a spectator; and we might do far worse than re-introduce it into our waltz-struck ball-rooms. But it had been a long day.

We had already had one supper, so most of us left by midnight before the ball supper and sought the seclusion of our train cabins.

The next day was gloriously fine and warm, and we started off at ten to take up our positions for the sham fight which General Kouropatkine had arranged in our honour, but we were asked to inspect first a new artesian well which was being sunk to the depth of over 750 feet for the benefit of the inhabitants.

Those of us who wanted to ride now mounted our Cossack horses and rode off, each accompanied by a Cossack attendant, to the scene of action on the south side of Ashabad. The "idea" was that a force was advancing from Ashabad and driving in the rear-guard of an enemy retreating over the mountains. The rear-guard had taken up a strong position overlooking the plain, just where the steppe begins to rise. I thoroughly enjoyed my ride towards the Kopet Dagh, which looked quite lovely in the bright sunshine. Our coign of vantage was immediately behind the read-guard battery where we could see everything. I am not going to criticise the development of the attack, but one feature struck me as very unusual, and this was the

way in which the cavalry charge was managed. Cavalry met cavalry in a splendid fashion, but they passed through each other and then, so to speak, promptly changed sides, for after re-forming they

GENERAL KOUROPATKINE AND STAFF

charged again. The effect of these double charges of Cossack and Turkman militia was most thrilling.

General Kouropatkine, mounted on a beautiful white Arab and surrounded by a large and brilliant staff, watched the course of the action up to the final bayonet charge, when, with a ringing cheer,

defenders and attackers rushed through each other. Then the whole force was formed up below the bluff on which we were standing, and General Kouropatkine addressed them, concluding by drinking to the Emperor's health. As he drained his glass the massed bands struck up the National Anthem, the men sending up cheer after cheer: the effect was that of successive waves beating on the sea-shore, one wave hardly dying away before the next began. Altogether a fine effect. The General then went round to each unit saying: *Zdorovo rebiata* ("Good morning, my children"), or *Zdorovo bratzy* ("Good morning, my brethren"), to which the answer would come, shouted out in perfect time: *Zdravia jelajem vache Prevóstro-Ditelstro* ("We wish good health to your Excellency").

It looks a good deal in print, but it sounds like five short hoarse cries when it comes from a whole battalion or squadron. If the Czar is the Father of all his subjects, so too is the officer of his men, and this relationship is very marked in, and characteristic of, the Russian army.

And now General Kouropatkine dismounts and courteously invites us to follow him. We do so, and find ourselves presently introduced to the

soldiers' rations which are set out on small tables for us to taste. There was first the cabbage soup which we sipped with new wooden spoons—kept, needless to say, as a souvenir—then meat, rye bread and vodka. This last was distinctly strong, but the rations were excellent, and we hoped the men would enjoy their midday meal. So far as I could see the cooking was conducted on no fixed principle, as in our army. Then we proceeded to luncheon ourselves. A long tent had been pitched close in rear of the battery near where we had been watching the fight, and to this we wended our way. A royal repast was waiting us, the courses were seemingly interminable, and included two sheep roasted whole close by in trenches. Nothing seemed to be too good for us, the officers in their courtesy waiting on us, even General Zerpitsky, one of the umpires of the fight, and with General Kouropatkine our joint host, personally seeing to our wants. Imagine an English Brigadier waiting on Russian tourists! I am afraid our national hospitality would have stopped short of this extreme act of courtesy. But it was quite evident from the first that we were to be made much of, and no political mission of the highest rank *could* have been better treated than we were.

While lunch was proceeding one of the bands played near our end of the table and the Cossacks danced and sang. The result was that an enormous crowd of soldiers soon collected round the tent on its open side, and Russian discipline did not prevent this or object to it as unseemly.

The first speech of course was General Kouropatkine's. He proposed in a few words of French the health of our Queen, and the band played our National Anthem, which was received with loud cheers and drinking of our health. But when I proposed in few and halting phrases the health of the Czar, the enthusiasm was immense, and all the crowd joined in the magnificently sonorous Russian hymn. Then our doctor proposed a vote of thanks to our hosts, which we all cordially applauded, and an atmosphere of good fellowship rapidly spread between English and Russian.

We were witnesses of an interesting custom before lunch finished. After the speeches were over a procession of officers came to the General from the lower end of the tent headed by one of their number bearing a glass full of wine on a tray. This is considered a very complimentary act, so we are told, and there is no doubt of General

Kouropatkine's popularity in his government. It is etiquette also to drink the glass right off, and when the General set down the empty glass there was a scene of wild enthusiasm. But *jam satis*—at a signal from the General the bugle sounded, and in less than a minute we were alone in that tent and every man was standing to his arms, and silence reigned where a moment before had been noise and confusion.

While the troops were being formed up for the march past I took the opportunity of closely inspecting the Turkman Militia. Their horses are beautiful animals—far finer than the scrubby-looking Cossack mounts—the Turkmans themselves in their black sheepskin busbies were a fine-looking set of men of a warrior race that scorns agriculture, though what effect a long period of peace will have on them remains to be proved. The great wooden saddles and the quaint trappings were objects of interest—how they and the Cossacks stick on with their short stirrups and high saddles is to us Englishmen little short of marvellous. Russia may well be proud of her latest volunteers—the first and most warlike race of Central Asia—her willing vassals for a rifle and £2 a year!

Those of us on horseback were honoured by being asked to take up a position on the saluting base close by General Kouropatkine and his staff, so we were enabled to have the best of views of the march past, which now commenced. The infantry came first in column of sections, ten in front; then the artillery, well-horsed, by half-batteries of three guns at a walk in the following order: mountain batteries, light horse batteries, and heavy field-guns. Then followed the cavalry, Cossacks first and Turkmans last; after them came a corps of railway men, and the rear was brought up by about twenty cyclists in mufti, presumably our hosts of the previous evening.

As each unit marched past the General said: *Spasibo rebiata* ("Thank you, my children"), and back came the answer, rapped out in four paces in perfect unison: *Rady staratsia vache Prevostro Ditelstro* ("We are glad to serve your Excellency"), the Turkmans making an extra syllable of the foreign tongue by pronouncing the "*stro*" of *Ditelstro*.

Speaking generally, the distances were not very well kept, and the front, narrow as it was, failed to show that unbroken line we are accustomed to

see in England. Smartness, in our sense of the word, there was none anywhere, but the men seemed all well set up and strong. The cavalry mounts varied considerably, but looked useful beasts, though not groomed like European cavalry, and accoutrements generally were ragged.

Every man serves four years out here, after which he gladly returns to Holy Russia. The officers are given grants of land to build houses on, and the Government advances them money for building purposes which is to be repaid, capital and interest, in thirty years—a sort of Queen Anne's Bounty. The barracks—as I saw myself—are roomy and well built; each regiment has its own large barrack-square, with open-air gymnasium attached, wherein also are to be seen specimens of rifle-pits, shelter-trenches, and revetments. The regimental officers' houses are situate close to their own barracks.

Such information and more of a similar character I gleaned from General Kouropatkine as I rode back into Ashabad with him after the march past was over. We reached our train home about 2 P.M. after a thoroughly enjoyable morning, all of us much impressed by the nature of our reception—

for had we been minor Royalties—to say nothing of a political mission—the authorities could hardly have done more for us.

The vanity of greatness, however, came home to me, for the influenza claimed me, and I returned to the train only to go straight to bed. I was lucky in not missing much, as the bazaars at Ashabad are very poor, and the gala performance in the circus in our honour in the evening would not have attracted me very much. As it was, what interested the visitors most was, perhaps, not the performance itself so much as seeing the fair equestrienne who had turned the heads of all Ashabad!

The next day was the Name-day of the Empress Mother and therefore a fête-day. There was a special service in the Cathedral and a review of the troops afterwards in the square outside, where is the monument erected to those who fell before Geok-Tepè. The priest finished the service in this square, and in his prayers thanked Almighty God for our presence there that day as peaceful travellers, and further prayed for peace between the two great nations of the Russians and English. The gentlemen of the party then left cards on General Kouropatkine, Colonel Borisoff, chief of the railway,

General Zerpitsky and others. In all these minor courtesies of life the Russians are, and rightly too, very particular. Madame Kouropatkine and Madame Klemm had called on the ladies of the party, so every one was soon socially "fixed up."

I was still confined to bed, but General Kouropatkine most kindly sent his chief aide-de-camp, Baron Osten-Sacken, to inquire after me, and I received calls in my little cabin from many of the officers.

It had been a glorious morning, so I grudged my enforced loss of time very much, but consoled myself with the thought that we should be travelling all the afternoon and night, and that by the time we reached Merv I meant to be quite well.

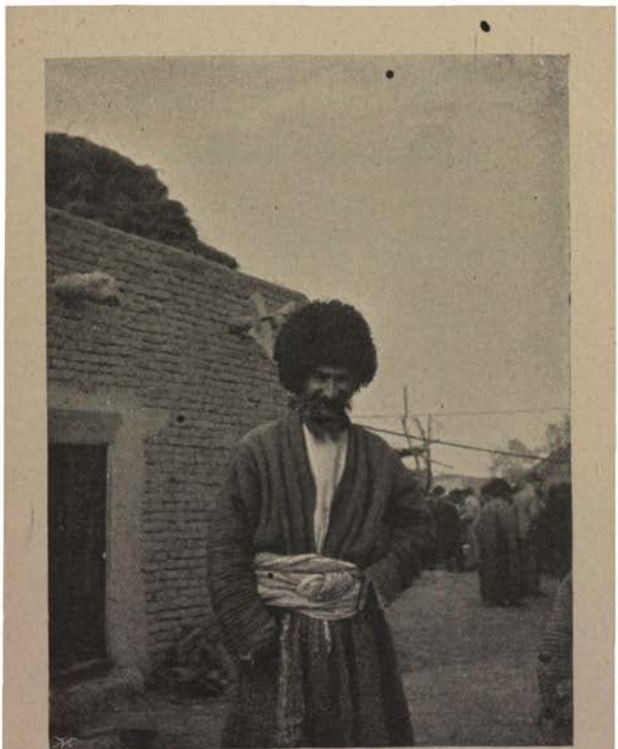
At 2.30 we slowly steamed out of Ashabad, saying *au revoir* to the many who had come down to see us off. Two stations up the line we picked up three of our party who had been out shooting since 7 A.M., and had the magnificent bag of three partridges! Though by a recent law pheasants are to be protected for three years, yet special permission had been given to the guns to shoot them if they saw any. A further proof, if any were needed, of the extraordinary character of our reception.

CHAPTER VI

MERV

We arrived at Merv at 1 A.M. on Saturday, the 27th of November, having during the night left the oasis of the Attak and crossed another oasis, that of Tejend. The oasis of the Attak extends along the foot of the mountains from Ashabad to Doushak, where the southernmost point of the line is reached. I have already said that the kingdom of Persia lies on the other side of the mountains of the Kopet Dagh and Gulistan, but between Ashabad and Doushak there is a Persian town called Luftabad, which has nothing of interest about it beyond the fact that it is a standing monument of the tortuous paths of diplomacy which seemingly for no conceivable reason went out of its way to leave to

Persia a town in Russian territory. But Doushak is bound to be an important place some day, for it



A MERVI

is the nearest town on the railway to the oases of Saraks and Pendeh or, as we call it, Penjdeh, on the road to Herat and India.

When Merv became Russian Saraks and Pendeh

followed suit, and at the present moment the railway is being pushed down south toward the Afghan frontier, greatly to the alarm of the Russophobe party among us. But why do we stop at Quetta?

The Pendeh oasis gets its fertility from the river of the same name; it is however the same stream that flows past Herat under the name of Heri-rud. Both the Pendeh and the Mourgab, the river of Merv, end their days in the same uninteresting fashion. After having almost all their life-blood sucked out of them by irrigation, the little moisture that remains is lost in the sands of the Kara-Kum desert. Once upon a time, geographers tell us, they must have flowed into the Oxus when that river flowed due west instead of due north as it does now.

When we got up in the morning we found that, as at Ashabad so here, a programme had been arranged for us, so we took our places in the droskies which were ready waiting and started out to visit a Merv village. It lay some twenty minutes away on the other side of the Mourgab, which we crossed by a rather crazy wooden bridge which apparently does duty for trains, carriages, and pedestrians alike. It was a glorious day, but the

dust was as thick as a sand storm and nearly choked us all as we drove. Just on the other side of the river lies the modern Russian town, if indeed we could call such a small settlement a town, and high

LADEN CAMELS IN A MERV VILLAGE

over the houses loom the mighty unfinished mud walls of the fort which gives its name to the place, viz. : Koushid Khan Kala. This mighty fort, whose walls are sixty feet thick at the base, tapering up to twenty feet where their height from the ground is forty feet, was built under forced labour by the

Tekkes after the fall of Geok-Tepè, but was never finished because, as all the world knows, the Russians got possession, within a space of little more than three years after the fall of the latter

MERVI WOMEN MAKING FELT

fortress, of the Merv oasis and its dependencies by diplomacy and without force of arms. As we drove out we passed some native brick-kilns, but the majority of buildings in Central Asia are built with sun-dried bricks, as the expenses in connection with kiln-baked bricks are very heavy, and whatever may

happen in the future when the finances of Central Asia are in a better condition, at present at any rate travellers are more likely to see sun-dried bricks used than any other form of building material.

QUADRANGLE OF A MERVI COLLEGE

At last we reached our Tekke village. It was a collection of mud houses with kibitkas dotted about, the whole scene reminding me of Egypt with the exception, of course, of the kibitkas. There were the familiar camels, only larger and better, the tethered horses and the fat-tailed sheep and the

dogs, and the same white glare from the dusty walls and roads. We found the elders of the village drawn up to receive us, who, after submitting to the concentrated fire of every available photographic instrument, were glad enough to disperse to their houses and tents, and we were taken to see the manufacture of carpets and felt going on in primitive fashion in the open air. We inspected some kibitkas, photographed the women and children, and then proceeded towards the square of mud hovels which does duty for school and university. A queer looking place it is, each side consisting of from seven to eight of these little hovels, and at each corner of the square there is a gateway. I went into one of these houses and found it to consist of a mud floor raised about six inches above the ground level, with a lot of niches all round the walls for the scholars to put their possessions in, and a hearth for a fire, while light was admitted through oiled paper which was stretched over the window and door frames. It was holiday time, so we saw no scholars about, but we called on the Mollah, who lived in the corner under the shadow of the mosque, and found him deep in the study of the Koran, squatted on his carpet and surrounded by his coffee pot and

domestic utensils. My wife, through Mons. de Klemm, asked for a holiday for the scholars in honour of our visit and the old man promised it. I can only hope he did not forget his promise.

But now we had to pass from the arts of peace to those of war, for we were to be present at another sham fight; so, escorted by our Turkman militia, who, by the way, had come to the station to meet us, we drove out across the plain, through a half-brigade of Russians waiting on the outskirts of our village for the order to advance.

The plain contained some really big trees and a thick growth of Khar which gave forth an odour as we drove through it. The ground was very uneven, and this with the thick undergrowth would make it very difficult for manœuvring. Here and there we could see dotted about small watch-towers of the same character that one sees on the hill-country of Benjamin. These were erected to keep a look-out for the marauders who in old days would sweep down on the oasis from neighbouring oases, when every man's hand was against his brother's, before the "Ouroussi" or Russians had pacified the whole of Central Asia.

We drove along the dusty track for about a mile and a half, until we came to the lines of the other half-brigade, and past a gang of workmen engaged on irrigation work, and finally arrived at another

MERVI MUSICIANS

village, where we were greeted with the music of six flute players drawn up in front of some native carpets spread on the ground. We interpreted this as a sign of welcome, but the strains were weird in the extreme. The band consisted of three boys and three men with long cane flutes through which

they produced between them a sort of harmony and kept time, though of course to our ears there was no tune at all. It was curious to watch them as they swung slowly from side to side, and then when they wanted to make a high note they would throw back their heads and all the flutes would go up in the air together. The boys wore skull caps from under which issued their wisps of coalblack locks, their heads for the most part being shaved quite bare. I bought the best looking flute from one of the boys and I reproduce it here.

SILVER-MOUNTED CANE FLUTE FROM MERV

So far as I could judge they produced the sounds by placing the end of the flute between their upper lips and teeth, and I do not suppose I should find anybody in England who could produce a tune out of this instrument even if I wanted to! Some one expressed a wish to photograph some of the native women, so the orders were given, and out they came in all their glory of silver-bespangled headdress, and made a very effective group squatted at the foot of one of their kibitkas.

But the guns were beginning to boom, so we

hastened back and took up our positions on the bank of a dyke just in rear of the defenders' half-battery. I reproduce the scheme exactly as it was given to me by an orderly:

НАЧАЛЬНИКЪ
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ЗАКАСПІЙСКОЙ
СТРѢЛКОВОЙ БРИГАДЫ.

189

№

LA LEGENDE DES MANŒUVRES DE LA GARNISON DE MERW.

15 Novembre.

L'AVANT garde des forces principales de l'ennemi, approchant du côté du nord-ouest par la route de l'aoule Kayki-Zareng sur la digue Egri-Gusard, a donné ordre à son détachement de tête composé de cinq compagnies d'Infanterie, d'une demi-batterie et d'une centaine de Cosaques, de traverser la digue pour occuper la position près du canal Ack-Bay, de s'y fortifier afin de retenir les forces adversères pour donner le temps à l'avant-garde de déboucher par la digue Egri-Gusard.

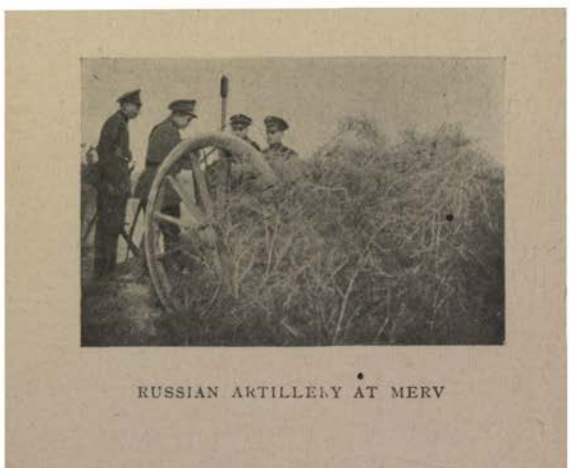
Le commandant en chef de la garnison de Merw ayant reçu le rapport de l'approche de l'ennemi, a donné l'ordre d'éxpédier de la garnison un détachement de six compagnies d'Infanterie, d'une demi-batterie et deux centaines de Cosaques pour attaquer l'ennemi, le rejetter au nord et empecher par là le passage de son avant garde par la digue Egri-Gusard.

The fight from a scientific point of view was not very interesting. The Cossacks on our left were having a little mimic affair to themselves, and our half-battery ignored them entirely. It went on

MERVI WOMEN OUTSIDE A KIBITKA

pounding away on the advancing infantry, whom I, for one, could not see owing to the inequalities of the ground and the undergrowth. The last moments were made interesting by the explosion of two mines just in front of us; nevertheless, that did not prevent the usual charge through at the end

and both sides firing, while bands played, at imaginary retreating foes. Then we adjourned for our *al-fresco* lunch, sitting on the bank of the dyke, and shaded by trees, while the general's wife and other Russian ladies helped to entertain us and make the time pass pleasantly. The *mise-en-scène* was very



RUSSIAN ARTILLERY AT MERV

good; the Turkmans on horseback lined a ridge in front of us, the brigade was formed up to our right, and groups of natives were dotted about here and there, while just in front of us and below us a few yards away were the officers of the brigade also lunching. Of course, the usual toasts were given and drunk with enthusiasm, and then a Cossack captain got up and made a speech, which Mons. de Klemm translated to us. He said that he had heard there were a

large number of English people coming, and he thought that an invasion was about to take place; and with this in his mind he slept, and in his sleep he dreamed, and he saw in the heavens a tiny speck which grew larger and larger, and then he saw that it was a large balloon, and he said to himself, "These

RUSSIAN INFANTRY MARCHING PAST AT MERV

are the English who have come to invade us," and he made himself ready to meet them. But now the English were actually here, they turned out to be a party of friendly people, not only English *men*, but *ladies* as well; and he for one was right glad at such an invasion, and hoped there were many more to come! Needless to say, I did my best to make a suitable reply to so gallant a speech, at the conclusion of which I was presented in due form with a

glass of wine on a tray, and I drained the contents in honour of our Russian hosts.

We then drove off, halting on the way home to watch the brigade march past General Spokoisky-Fransévitch. In the evening we were entertained at a ball at the Club; Madame Spokoisky-Fransévitch acted as hostess, and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. It was only with the greatest difficulty that we men were allowed to get into the dancing-room, so enthusiastic were our friends the officers at the buffet of the refreshment-room, who drank our health and that of our Queen, our nation, our army, our navy, and our ladies.

Seated on the dais at the head of the ball-room we had a splendid view of the dancing, and a table near at hand laden with sweetmeats—a Persian custom—tempted the ladies from time to time. Before we left one of the Russian ladies danced the Cossack dance with an officer of the Cossacks, and charmed us all with her elegance and grace. This was the same dance we had hitherto only seen danced by two men, under which condition it perforce loses much of its attractiveness. We left, as we had entered the club, to the strains of our National Anthem—a delicate compliment which helped to

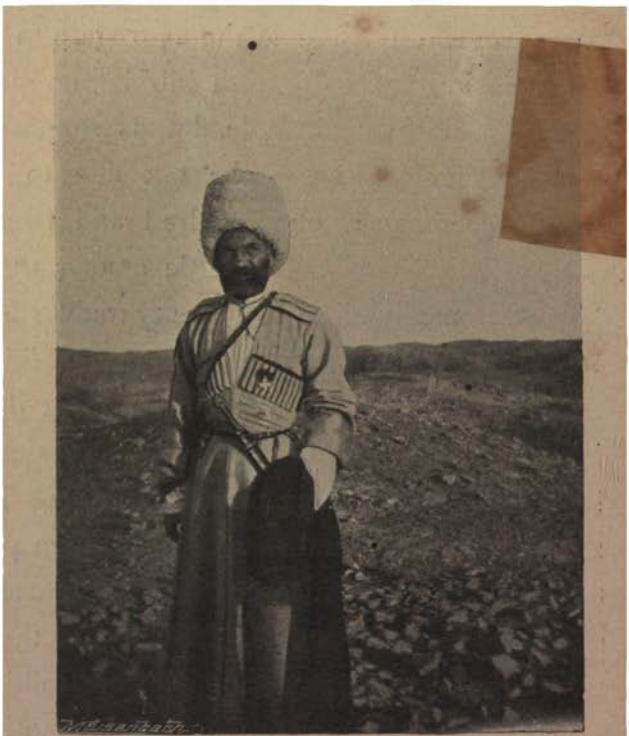
make us appreciate the heartiness of our reception in Merv.

The next day was Sunday, and, as the train did not leave until the afternoon for our next halting-place, General Spokoisky-Fransévitch had arranged for us to witness some races and a *jigitofka*. We drove out again across the bridge and through the walls of the mighty fortress Koushid Khan Kala to the plain beyond, where we found that a crowd of people had already collected to watch the proceedings. Opposite the middle of the course chairs were placed, and behind these chairs two bands, which during the performance played alternately. And now the first part of the programme began, which consisted of horse-racing by the Turkmans. The course was absurdly short, and the riders used their whips and heels the whole way. The most interesting part to us was the distribution of the prizes afterwards. This took place on the other side of the course, almost opposite to where we were standing. The prizes were distributed by an ancient Turkman set aloft on a camel, who so far as we could judge from the tremendous excitement of the surging crowd round the old man, must have had great difficulty in giving his rewards, as every-

body seemed to be claiming a prize! While this curious scene was being enacted, Madame Spokoisky-Fransévitch, the wife of the General, was giving me some information about Merv. She told me that the whole garrison, with the exception of one company left for duty, had to be moved to Krasnovodsk from July to October, owing to the terrible scourge of malaria or influenza, or by whatever name the disease may choose to be called. It seems that 3000 of the natives perished from it during the year. But with the return of the cold weather the Russian troops had been brought back again, though a great majority of the officers were actually suffering during our visit. I was anxious to hear a little about the government of Merv, as I wished to find out how the Russians manage their conquered Asiatics. The oasis, I was informed, is divided into four vilayets which are administered by four *chefs de district*, who are Russian officers. Each of these vilayets has about twenty villages; each village has its own head-man, who is elected by the natives, subject to the approval of the *chef de district.* In each village also there are two judges, elected and subject to the approval of the *chef de district.* Of these forty judges, five are always on duty at a

time. The Russians levy taxes at the rate of six roubles for each kibitka, but each village has its own assessment committee, and provided the return to the Government amounts in the aggregate to the equivalent of six roubles for each kibitka, no questions are asked. For example, let us suppose a village of twenty kibitkas — the tax due to the Russian Government is one hundred and twenty roubles, but the village leaders settle among themselves how this one hundred and twenty roubles is to be paid; thus, a widow woman occupying a kibitka would not pay six roubles, whereas her next door neighbour, a man with many camels and sheep, would pay considerably more than six roubles. But as long as one hundred and twenty roubles are paid from the village, the Russians very wisely refuse to interfere with the assessment. The Russians themselves have no taxes to pay. As we were talking, the General's son rode up and greeted his mother. He is a fine, dashing, good-looking young fellow, in a crack cavalry regiment, and he is now visiting his parents in their temporary exile. I had occasion to remark on his superb charger, quite the finest specimen of horse-flesh I saw in Central Asia, and was very much interested to learn that the sire was English.

And now began the *jigitofka*, which being interpreted is "an exhibition of horsemanship." This



A COSSACK OFFICER

part of the programme was carried out by the Cossacks. One often reads of the wonderful horsemanship of these soldiers, but one does not often get a chance of actually seeing their feats of *manége*.

A SOTNIA OF COSSACKS, MERV.

There was absolutely nothing that they did not seem capable of doing with their horses going at full speed. They picked up small bundles from the ground, they stood upright in their saddles waving their sabres, or firing at an imaginary pursuer, they carried off their wounded comrades at their saddle bow, they dismounted and mounted again also at full gallop—these and many other extraordinary things they did, and wound up by a charge *en masse* right down the course. I discovered that the small bundles which they picked off the ground contained a silver rouble, a piece of soap, and a roll of cloth of the same stuff as their uniforms.

After this exhibition was over I drove off and left the necessary cards, and found time to peep at the great market on the station side of the river. As it was Sunday we saw everything in full swing, Sunday being one of the two days in the week on which the markets are held. This market reminded me very much of the Soko at Tangier. We were taken round by the police, as a curious and inconvenient mob followed us everywhere. We bought little or nothing, as the prices were high and there was no time for bargaining. Driving back to the station we noticed the various kinds of trees which

seem to flourish in this part of the world. I recognised the elm, the maple, the poplar, and the acacia, and it was interesting to notice how, the further east of the Caspian we got, the larger and more forest-like became the trees. We began where there were none, and we finished where they grew as large and lusty as in our own far-away England.

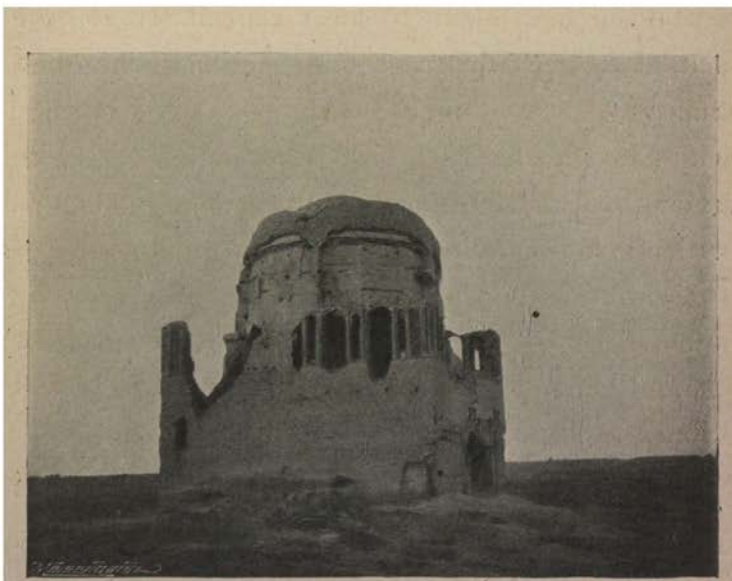
We left Merv at 1 o'clock, the General, accompanied by his officers, doing us the honour of coming down and seeing us off, while the tedium of waiting for the train to start was enlivened by the presence of one of the brigade bands. As we slowly steamed out of Merv we sent up cheer after cheer for our hosts, who again returned their Russian "Hurrah."

The country between Merv and Bairam-Ali is covered with cane-brakes and juniper bushes, and is dotted over with the small watch-towers which I have spoken of above.

An hour's ride brought us to the station of Bairam-Ali, where we were met by Colonel de Kaschtalinsky and an officer of Cossacks, and under their charge we were to visit old Merv, the Merv of history, the Merv that poets and historians called the "Queen of the World."

It was difficult to realise that we were actually in the classical Margiana, once a satrapy of the Great King Darius, a province of Alexander the Great (whose name still lingers in these parts in the form of Iskander) and the home of the Parthians. On our left, as the train approaches the station, lie the vast ruins of at least three mighty cities—the classical city founded 328 B.C., the city of Sultan Sanjar of the eleventh century, and finally the city of Bairam-Ali which was laid waste by the Bokhariotes in 1783. Twice in its troubled career has Merv been the city of a Christian Bishop, once in the fifth century, and again in the fourteenth century. Somewhere under this waste of ruins lies buried the mighty Alp Arslan whose favourite residence Merv was, and where by his own request his body was laid after death. The great and good Sultan Sanjar, of the same house, reigned here in the middle of the eleventh century, when an invasion of the wild Turkmans overran the fair oasis. In 1221 a still fiercer hurricane of destruction swept down on Merv headed by a son of the terrible Genghis. Another century and a half rolls by and Timur the Tartar has become the possessor, then follow the Persians and finally the savage Bokhariotes, who left the place

as we see it now. It was not until 1856 that the present inhabitants of the oasis, the Turkmans under Koushid Khan, poured down from the Altai mountains only to find themselves crushed a quarter



TOMB OF SULTAN SANJAR

of a century later by the Russians. A wild and cruel and fierce race these Tekke Turkmans; so evil was their character that the proverb ran, "If you meet a viper and a Mervi, kill the Mervi first and the viper after."

The traveller who expects to see ruins such as

those of Greece or Rome will be bitterly disappointed as he drives across the waste, that once must have seen the flourishing cities of so many dead centuries. We found at the station droskies which had been sent from new Merv to meet us, and we at once started to see what was to be seen, passing first through a large property belonging to the Emperor, and managed by Colonel de Kaschtalinsky. Here are channels full of water and traces of careful cultivation going on all round. We saw great yards full of bales of cotton waiting to be taken away by train; an effort is also being made to introduce the culture of the vine, by the introduction of French and Caucasian varieties for the purpose of wine-making. The native grapes are excellent for eating but no use for wine. Then almost before we knew where we were, we found ourselves before the mighty wall and great gateway of the latest of the cities of Merv. Our drive lasted about four hours, during which we drove through a desolating wilderness of ancient crumbling walls and gateways, with here and there a meaningless ruin standing up gaunt and bare against the sky. No ivy or creepers are here to make decay picturesque, or ruins romantic. A desolation of miles of shapeless mounds and enor-

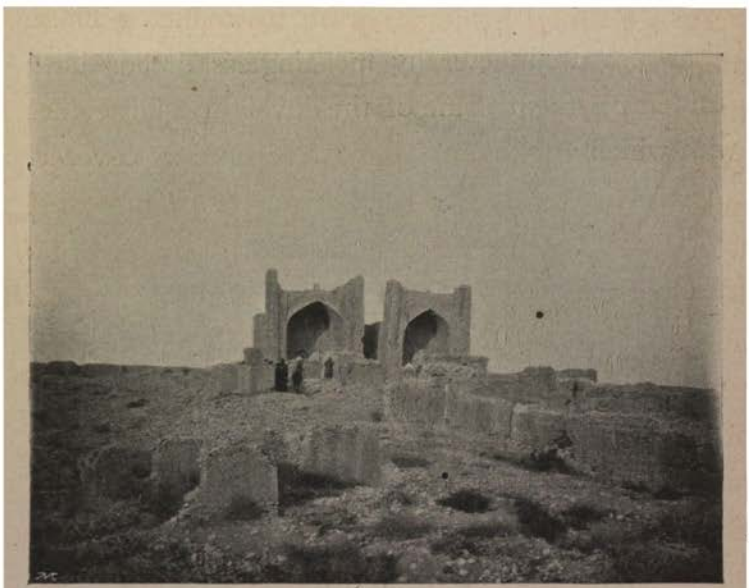
mous brick city walls do not raise much emotion in a Westerner's heart.

The remains of three cities lie here side by side, and the superficial area covered is said to be about twenty-seven square miles. This area must include suburbs, because the walls of the earliest city measured only 900 square yards. This city the Arabs took in A.D. 666, and the second city, according to O'Donovan, measured 600 square yards. But these measurements must surely only refer to the citadel or acropolis, if one may borrow the word. Driving as we did, the lines of these still massive walls conveyed no meaning. It was impossible to say when we entered one city or left another; everywhere are walls with remains of gateways and great towers, mighty fosses and formidable vallums. The base of these walls is in some places over seventy feet in thickness! Built originally of sun-dried bricks, they now present the appearance of having been made of mud. Some of the buildings whose forms are yet not quite lost show a substructure of kiln-baked bricks with a finish of sun-baked bricks. In the absence of any antiquarian guide it was impossible and useless even to guess about the meaning of all we saw.

A GATEWAY, OLD MERV.

There are, however, two monuments of the city of Sultan Sanjar which have enough of them left to be of interest to the traveller. The first of these are the two porticoes which mark the site of the tombs of the two standard-bearers of the Prophet. These great and architecturally meaningless arches have still left on them some of the lovely turquoise tiles with which at one time they were entirely covered, and the two tombs at their base are now protected by palisades which from the pieces of rag tied to them prove to us that they are still bournes of pilgrimage to the Faithful. The tombs are covered with two heavy stone slabs graven with verses from the Koran. The second ruin we visited was the tomb of Sultan Sanjar himself. This lay about a mile further on. It is a square building surmounted by a dome, which still has a few of the turquoise tiles left, and the tomb itself in the centre seems to have been reverently cared for through centuries of change. As we entered we startled some owls from their resting-places, which was all the life we saw among these almost forgotten relics of the past. Our drivers took us some little way further to see a modern mosque, where we were received anything but hospitably by the surly fanatic in charge, who

probably would very much have liked to have prevented us from entering had he dared. His cat, disturbed from her slumbers by the unwonted tread of the Giaour on the minaret steps, jumped hurriedly



TOMBS OF THE TWO STANDARD-BEARERS OF THE PROPHET

into the courtyard forty feet below, and vanished like a streak of light from the astonished gaze of those of us who had remained on the ground level!

One could not help thinking what a magnificent field was here for antiquarian exploration and research. Underneath these mounds and shapeless

ruins must lie untold wealth, if not of gold and silver, at any rate of historic value, and yet so far as I am aware no spade has yet broken the soil of Old Merv.

As we drove home we were treated to a most glorious sunset which reminded me more than anything else of one of those one sees so often in Egypt. As the sun sank the temperature dropped very quickly, and we were very glad to get back to the warm air and comfortable house of Colonel de Kaschtalinsky, whose wife had invited us all to come into tea. The Colonel showed us his plans of irrigation, and when these are carried out the prosperity of the ancient "Queen of the World" will, after so many years of extinction, again begin to rise. Here, at any rate, in the private domain of the Czar is the nucleus of a restoration which every one must hope will be the means of bringing back into cultivation what once must have been a veritable Garden of Eden.

CHAPTER VII

BOKHARA

THE distance between Bairam-Ali and the Amou-Daria is a matter of some hundred and fifty miles, and as we left the former place on Sunday night we arrived at the latter at half-past eight on Monday morning. This was an hour and a half before the advertised hour, but to the Russian time seems of no object, nor does he seem very particular about the cost of a thing: roubles or kopecks are much the same to him. I suppose nobody would call the Russian a business-like nation, but still they manage somehow to get on all right and at the same time to give more trouble and worry to the English, who consider themselves to be quite the most business-like nation on earth, than anybody else. So on

this particular journey some of our party took a long time to reconcile themselves to the Russian *laissez-aller* method of going on. They seemed to think that things ought to be done as they would have been, let us say, in England or America, and wanted to know what was going to happen to us long before we reached any particular place. This attitude of mind was quite inexplicable to our kind friends in charge of us, who failed to see entirely why we should trouble ourselves about a thing in the future, and though we never knew what was going to happen to us before our actual arrival in a place, yet everything went off most smoothly, and there was no hitch of any kind throughout the whole of our stay in Central Asia.

I looked out of my window about half-past seven and saw we were passing through a billowy sea of sand with patches here and there of a sort of white hoar-frost glistening in the early sun—strong evidence of the presence of salt! The line was protected from this sand by revetments on both sides. Presently the desert melted away into an oasis of the now familiar kind; then came horses, camels, cattle, and human beings. Trees too now appeared, the best we had yet seen, and when the

train stopped at Amou-Daria, we realised that we had left the dominions of the Czar and entered those of the Emir of Bokhara, whose frontier line we had crossed some little way back.

We were met at the station by the Beg of Tchardjoui in person, with his escort, and by the colonel of the Russian battalion stationed there—Colonel Masloff. The Beg is a fine-looking man, and his magnificent robe and white turban impressed us very much. He had sent on to Bairam-Ali one of his attendants to make up with Mons. de Klemm's help the best possible programme for our short stay at Amou-Daria; so I was prepared for the extraordinary difference in costume between the Turkman and the Bokhariote. The enormous sheepskin hat is gone—a great white turban has taken its place; the girdled and striped dressing-gown is no longer seen, but the eye is dazzled by the long flowing loose robe of gorgeous colours so dear to the Eastern. This dress is universal in Bokhara, and is still common in Samarcand, which was only torn from the Emir a generation back. The people are of Uzbeg race and speak Turki and a bastard Persian. Until quite recently they were fiercely fanatical Mohamme-

THE BEG OF TCHARDJOUI

IN HIS STATE ROBES

dans, but under Russian influence they have become tolerant to the point of latitudinarianism. But to return to our Beg. He had come to convey to us an invitation to lunch and to see a *baiga* and a dance of the *batchis*, which, needless to say, we cordially accepted. So having engaged all the available droskies of the place to the number of nine—because Amou-Daria is only a very small place and quite a modern one—we drove off about eleven o'clock to an open space about six minutes away, where a gaudy tent had been pitched on a mound about five feet above the level plain. We ascended to the tent by steps which had been cut on purpose, and there we found the Beg waiting to receive us—but he was a glorified Beg, having since his visit to the train put on his robes of state, which fairly dazzled us with their gorgeous magnificence of gold brocade! On the tables in the tent were tea *à la Russe* and an endless array of sweetmeats. Just outside was the band of the Russian battalion under the conductorship of an Italian in mufti, with whom I had some interesting conversation, and learnt from him how very fond of music the Emir of Bokhara is. He showed me some valuable trinkets the Emir had

given him in reward for his musical efforts, and told me also of the treasures he had collected during his stay in Bokhara. And I found that, like other expatriated Italians, he really lives in the future,

BATCHIS

and is always thinking of the day when he shall settle in his own beloved Rome.

But the *baiga* is about to commence. On looking down on to the plain there were about two hundred horsemen collected in front of the tent, and a wonderfully picturesque sight it was, for every man

wore a robe of various colours—nothing seemed too brilliant or dazzling—and as the sun shone brightly the effect of this mass of colour was very striking. We saw now for the first time the curious boots of

SOME BAIGA PLAYERS

Bokhara of tanned leather, with hooks for heels, very useful for riding but almost impossible for walking, one would think. But a horseman is coming round from behind the tent with a shapeless-looking black object with which he rides right into the middle of the troop of horsemen, and the game

has begun. This shapeless black object is a freshly decapitated goat, and the game itself resembles more nearly than anything else football on horseback with no sides. Directly the goat is thrown on the ground everybody tries to pick it up and get clear away with it, so the awful confusion of two hundred horsemen trying to pick up a decapitated goat off the ground can better be imagined than described! I saw one man unhorsed, and how he ever emerged alive from that seething mass it is impossible to say. But at last one warrior has got the goat and away he goes across the plain, followed by all the others; sometimes they get him and sometimes they don't. If he gets clear away home the goat is his, or if it is taken from him by another rider, then the new possessor has to run the gauntlet in the same way. We watched this game played four or five times, a different goat being forthcoming for each set-to. The poor goats were huddled behind our tent, and one at a time lost his head as the requirements of the game in front of the tent demanded. It was wonderful to watch the horses: they never seemed to lose their heads or get in the least excited, but, like the polo ponies of England, played the game with as

much interest as their riders. It is not, however, a very interesting game to watch after one has seen it for about a quarter of an hour, but when the whole crowd of the two hundred players surged up the bank on to our tent-ropes it then became quite exciting enough. This happened more than once, and gave zest so far as spectators were concerned to an otherwise uninteresting game. When the Beg gave orders for the *baiga* to finish there were a few races such as we had seen at Merv, and then we adjourned for lunch, which consisted of varieties of *pilau*, and an endless supply of sweetmeats, and an abundance of the delicious melons for which Amou-Daria is so justly famous. In spite of cautions in books only to eat very sparingly of them, and then with wine, we disregarded both injunctions without any ill effects. Perhaps they are more dangerous in the summer, with only tea to drink, as the strict Mohammedan not only does not drink wine himself but refuses to give his guests any either.

Before lunch I wandered round behind the tent where I had seen two queer-looking objects dressing themselves in some rather gaudy clothes, their long black hair flowing down over their shoulders. I thought that they might probably be the dancing

boys or *batchis* whom we had been invited to see, and forthwith I photographed them. Nor was I wrong in my supposition, for now they appeared in

BATCHIS DANCING AND SPECTATORS

front of the tent, together with three old fellows, who squatted down on the ground and supplied the music for the dance by strumming on three drums and chanting a never-ending monotonous chant. These boys are supposed to be dressed up as women, and their dancing, though certainly not

graceful, is very quaint and interesting. They did a good deal with their hands, spreading out their fingers and using their wrists, but it conveyed nothing to us; and then they pretended to comb out their hair, or they would finger and play with it. They advanced or retired with short steps; they would fly round like teetotums with a rotatory motion, either upright or crouched low on their haunches; they even threw back somersaults—a form of calisthenics not properly belonging to dancing! Altogether a novel experience, but one that soon palled; and when it was over we lost no time in saying "Good-bye" to our host the Beg and in speeding back to our train, where I found my thermometer registering 25° Reaumur,* which gives some idea of the heat possible at the end of November in Central Asia.

It was here, curiously enough, and not in the Russian dominions proper, that I inspected a Russian barrack. There is no doubt of the excellence of the buildings, which are, however, only one-storied. I examined the rifles, and found them beautifully clean and in good order, though they

* The equivalent of 90° Fahr.

only hold five cartridges in the magazine, and have no "shut-off." One of the soldiers standing by was a marksman, and he showed us the badge he wore on his arm. We found that he wore a watch which had been given him at the same time as his badge, and on the dial was the Emperor's head. This struck me as an excellent idea, and a far better one than giving money as we do in the English army, which too often finds its way to the canteen; though I regret I did not inquire what happened if a man became a marksman two years in succession. They could hardly give him two watches. The beds are wooden ones, and the mattresses are filled with rushes from the river. There is by no means that smart appearance in the barracks any more than in the soldiers that one is accustomed to in England, but it is evident that great care is taken to foster a patriotic spirit and the emulation of bravery. For instance, hung up in every room is a roll of those soldiers who have won the St. George's Cross for bravery. There are also coloured plates of all the crosses and decorations of Russia; and last, but not least, there is always an oleograph of the Emperor. This last is somewhat more than a mere picture, for in whatever room it hangs there must all hats be

removed from the head. Over one of the beds I noticed a picture representing English soldiers fighting in India; also a plate representing the various uniforms of the British army! I was further interested to hear that the Russian soldiers are allowed to add to their pay, which is little enough, by working at trades or odd jobs when off duty.

We left Amou-Daria about half-past two, and the Beg came to see us off. We gave him tea on the Observation Car, but as Mons. de Klemm was the only man who could speak his language, it was very much of a state affair. Tchardjoui, the place from which he gets his title, is some little way off—too far for us, owing to our short stay, to have gone to him—and so he was kind enough to come to us. The whole of Bokhara is divided up into forty-four districts, each governed by a Beg. With the exception of capital punishment he is in every way supreme, and his jurisdiction is very often most summary. For instance, he can have any Bokhariote seized and beaten quite arbitrarily; and as taxes are collected in Eastern fashion, it is no uncommon sight in Bokhara to see a man being beaten in the bazaars because he has, in some way

or other, but nearly always from the tax point of view, displeased his Beg!

A hundred yards from the station flows the Amou-Daria or Oxus, and the railway is carried

BOKHARIOTE ARBAH

over it by a rather crazy-looking wooden bridge, which it took us twenty-four minutes to cross, as the engine-driver is not allowed to go faster than at a walking-pace, to ensure which a man precedes the train with a red flag in his hand. The regulations with regard to this bridge are very stringent. No

one is allowed on the bridge except by special permission, and no one is allowed to smoke on the train when crossing it. At the western end of the bridge is a hut containing a fire-engine and all the necessary appliances, while on the bridge itself fire-buckets are stationed at intervals.

When we crossed the water was low, and in the middle of the channel there was a mud island, which divided the two branches which flowed rapidly under the wooden piles. We did not see much of the Amou-Daria fleet, about which one had heard so much in England, as most of the boats were away up the river; but from all accounts it cannot be a very formidable flotilla. I met a man who had just returned from inspecting these boats. He had been as far as Karki, which is the Russian outpost towards the Afghan frontier. He told me that the country through which the river flows is dreary and desolate in the extreme, and they had the greatest difficulty in getting any food. At Karki itself no less than 75 per cent. of the Russian troops were stricken down and helpless with fever. Between this frontier post and the town of Amou-Daria the Russians have placed on the water six steamers and nine barges, having a mean draught of about two and

a half feet. Navigation is very difficult, the river being of the very worst kind for such purposes, having a shifting channel, a shallow bed, and a swift stream. The most astonishing thing about the steamers is that, though they have such ridiculously shallow draught, yet they are so cunningly built that they develop no less than 400 horse-power. The river itself is navigable as far as a place called Tayzabadkali, which is the third station beyond Karki, the two intervening ones being Kaliff and Padikissar.

We arrived at the station of Bokhara shortly before midnight, passing *en route* Kara-kul, so famous for its sheepskins. It seems a little curious that these skins, which fetch such extraordinary prices in Paris and London, should not be used in Bokhara itself, where, as I said above, the white turban completely takes the place of the sheepskin shako.

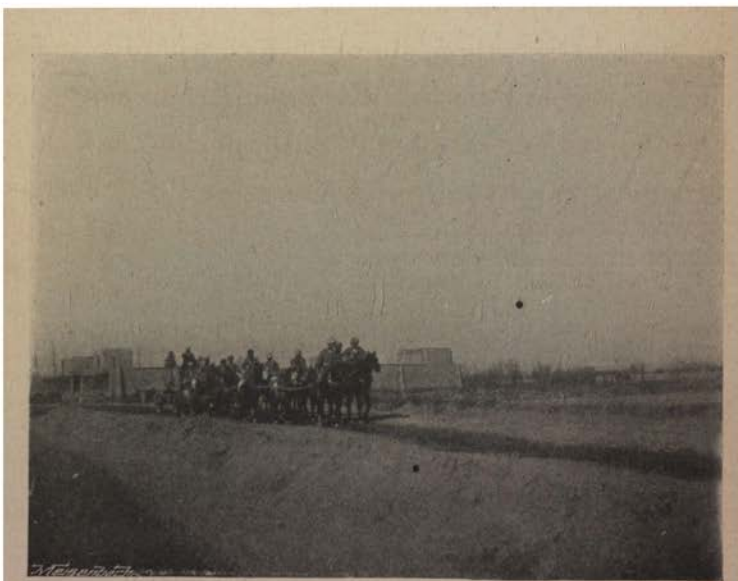
It was a bitterly cold night, the thermometer going down below freezing-point, but the next day broke bright again, and as soon as possible we went to pay our respects to Mons. Ignatieff, the Russian Resident Political Agent at the court of the Emir, whose house is quite close to the station. Springing

up all round the station is quite a new town, and a Russian one at that, while the Emir's town lies nine miles distant. Having finished our call, we lost no time in making a start for Old Bokhara, preceded

ON THE WAY TO BOKHARA

by an escort of five of the Emir's guards, bright with their many-coloured striped garments. Shortly after leaving the station there is seen on the left a fine stone palace rising with considerable architectural pretensions—in fact, it was the finest building we had seen this side of the Caspian. It is being

built for the Emir by a German architect, to whom I had the pleasure of being introduced. It is a little difficult to see what the Emir wants with a palace so close to the station, but perhaps if he takes to rail-



ROAD-MENDING, BOKHARA

way travelling, which nobody has accused him of at present, he might find it convenient to have a palace close to the station. But I rather suspect that the Russian magnet is drawing him down to the Russian town, and that there is some political reason for this new palace.

Our long drive took us through fields well cultivated and well watered, and our droskies rattled over a well-metalled road which was undergoing repair in parts. We saw a most civilised roller of a very ponderous type at work. It was being drawn by eighteen horses, three abreast, which will give some idea of its heavy character. Again I could not help noticing the trees, not only their number, but also their size. Bokhara is celebrated for its mulberry trees, which feed the silkworms that make the silk for which Bokhara is so celebrated. About half-way to the town we passed a huge mud wall about twenty feet high, running along the right hand side of the road. This conceals the palace and grounds of the Emir. In the front of the middle of the wall are a sentry-box and a sentry, and at the angle of the wall nearer the city are another sentry-box and another sentry—quite unlike any sentries or sentry-boxes I had ever seen before. The sentry-boxes were nothing but mud hovels with a wooden bench outside, while the sentry himself was an exceedingly ragged and dirty looking individual holding a thing that looked like a toy musket.

It was not easy to understand why these sentries

were there at all, because there were certainly none at the other angle of the wall facing the road, nor so far as we could see were there any others along the walls running at right angles to the road. Perhaps

A SENTRY AND SENTRY-BOX, BOKHARA

like some sentries in more civilised countries they still continue to do duty on beats the *raison d'être* for which had ceased to exist years and years ago.

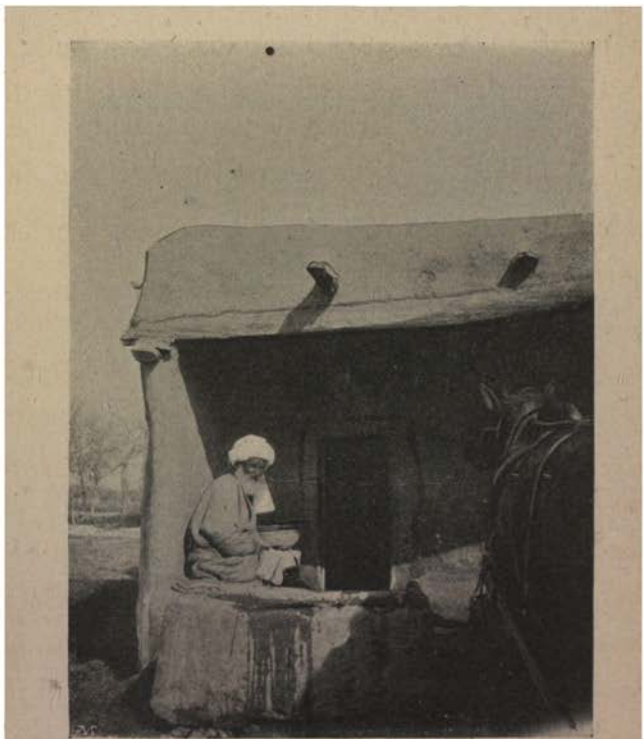
Some time before reaching the city gate one enters a long street of a suburb which is extremely picturesque and interesting. One is naturally prepared

for a certain amount of Orientalism after Cairo, Jerusalem, Damascus and Constantinople, but here in the territories of the Emir one seems at last to have got at the true thing unadulterated, in a blaze of colour that defies description, but with the usual contrast of mud hovels from which peep out quaintly wooden rafters and supports keeping these ramshackle buildings together and helping to break the bareness of the plaster.

We passed under the great mud gateway in the eastern wall of the city. It was deserted of its guards, and its great gong, which is used as a fire alarm, a tocsin, and a curfew, was hanging idly in the open guard-room, and so, unchallenged, we find ourselves inside Bokhara es Sherif—Bokhara the Noble.

Our street takes us between high walls of mud pierced by an occasional low door. On the left is a mosque with a large verandah supported by carved wooden pillars, the beams of the open roof carved too, and rudely painted, which is characteristic of this part of the world. Presently the street opens out—there are trees and a runnel of water. A little farther on is a house in process of building, and it is interesting to observe that kiln-baked bricks are

being used for the outside, while only sun-dried ones are being used for the interior. The walls were



A HALT—ON THE ROAD TO BOKHARA

hardly two feet high, so I cannot say how much of the house will eventually consist of the more expensive building material. but it is interesting to note that the French writer Boulangier says that

General Annenkoff discovered a difference in temperature of from ten to twelve degrees centigrade during the summer heats between the interior of a house built with kiln-baked bricks and one built of bricks dried in the sun, and he profited by this discovery in the building of the railway stations. The use then of the sun-dried bricks was not merely for economy, but it helps to make a house cooler and fresher.

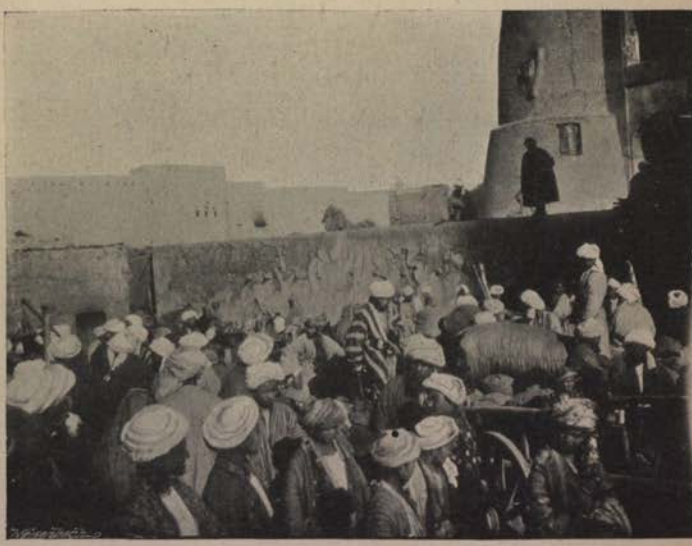
To those who have only visited the Europeanised East, Bokhara is a revelation, and one could stroll round the bazaars here feeling every day the same keen interest in all that is going on around as one did on one's first visit, let us say, to Cairo. I do not propose to give any guide-book information about Bokhara; there are other books where it may be read up from this point of view. I will merely record my impression of our three days' visit there. On the very entrance to the bazaar we were met by the Jews, who were very anxious for us to go and visit their synagogue and their quarter generally. I only wish I had done this more thoroughly. As it was I put it off to the last moment, and then did not see half I ought to have seen. Curzon in his book mentions with astonishment that he came across

a Jew there who could speak French; I presume that it must be the same one I met who also addressed me in French. But promising to return to our Jewish friends, we pushed on after our green and red-striped guides, who cleared the way for us in the most summary fashion with their whips, until we reached an open space containing two rather tumbled down Medresses or universities. Of the public buildings of Bokhara there is not much to be said, except that they want repairing very badly. The huge and meaningless arched porticoes give no repose to the eye, and when one knows that they not only look but really are architectural shams, they begin to have an absolutely ugly appearance, especially in their state of dis-repair. Covered as all these buildings, with their domes, arcades and arches, once were with lovely turquoise enamel, the traveller may well have marvelled at their beauty, but now in their decay, covered as by a tattered garment, with the mere shreds of their former beauty, one fails to appreciate them, and I venture to think rightly too, even at the cost of being thought a Philistine.

Having inspected some of the students' rooms of this Medresse, which were very much like the

rooms we had seen in the mud college in the Merv village, only on a grander scale, we wandered out again, descended the steps of the stone platform on which the Medresse was built, and threaded our way through the busy crowd in the bazaars, till we found ourselves outside one of the many mosques of Bokhara. In days of old Bokhara had a reputation throughout the whole Mohammedan world for its learning, and here in this city the most celebrated doctors of Islam taught. Pious Bokhariotes, too, will have it that within its walls there is a mosque for every day of the year. This may have been true in the days of yore, but it can hardly be the case now. As we passed through the precincts of this particular mosque it happened to be the hour of mid-day prayer, and we were fortunate enough to see the most picturesque sight. Outside the doors of the mosque the stone flags of the pavement were covered with devout Moslems engaged in prayer; through the low archway leading into the mosque we could see that the inside was packed quite full, and these worshippers outside were compelled to perform their prayers under the open sky. It is always an interesting sight to watch any body of Mohammedans at their prayers. So exactly do

they fulfil the regulations of the Prophet that it is possible for several hundreds to take their time from a leader, and like a regiment of soldiers doing physical drill, to proceed through the whole gamut



STREET SCENE, BOKHARA

of genuflexions and prostrations which are inseparable from their prayers. On the present occasion the surroundings helped the scene. As we looked there was the portal of the mosque on our left, the white-turbaned, many-coloured group of worshippers in front of us. On our right was one of those

pools so common in Bokhara, overshadowed by mulberry trees, and surrounded by booths in which were displayed all sorts of fruit and vegetables, and in front of which was ever passing an endless stream of men and women, conspicuous among whom are a string of five or six Dervishes in their conical hats, begging alms and chanting as they go. These pools contain water which is anything but clean or pure, and yet the inhabitants wash themselves in them and drink of them at the same time, with the natural result that they contract the most horrible diseases. Anybody who knows anything about Bokhara has heard of that terrible scourge of the worm of Medina, and though it is not quite certain what the origin of this disease is, yet it is popularly supposed to come from drinking the water. At any rate what happens is that there is bred in the body of the patient a worm which first appears in the leg; this has to be extracted with great care, as if it is broken by the doctor and left in the flesh mortification may ensue. Sometimes the same individual may have on him as many as twenty or thirty of these worms, which are often two or three feet long, and have, when

extracted, the appearance of a long string of vermicelli.*

We pick our way as carefully and unobtrusively as possible through our crowd of worshippers, and follow the guide through the labyrinth of the great bazaar till he brings us out in front of the Great Minaret or Minari Kalian of Bokhara, whence formerly criminals were hurled headlong. This savage method of execution has now been forbidden under pressure from Russia, though the present system can hardly be said to be much better, for the luckless wretch is now taken to some public spot where he is thrown on his back, and while one man sits on his legs, another squatting on his chest proceeds to hack off his head with a butcher's knife! Of the two I should prefer the drop from the tower, *sed Dis aliter visum est.* On the top of the tower was an enormous stork's nest, and indeed these storks' nests are quite a feature of the public buildings of Bokhara, which seem to be covered with them, and I suppose they are here as sacred as they are in German towns.

For these particulars I am indebted to the Hon. G. Curzon's book, "Russia in Central Asia."

VIEW OF THE MINAR KALIAN FROM THE COURTYARD OF THE MUSJID KALIAN
the Domes of the Medresse of Miri Arab beyond.

THE MEDRESSE OF SHIR DAR, SAMARCAND.

The Minari stands sentry over two of the finest buildings in Bokhara—namely, the Musjid Kalian and the Medresse of Miri Arab. The former has one dome and the latter two domes, still covered with turquoise tiles, which have a lovely effect in the clear atmosphere. I examined the Mihrab * of Musjid Kalian rather carefully. It is in the courtyard of this mosque that the State Friday service is supposed to be held, but it did not look to me as if it had been used for state purposes for some time. What we Christians would call the sanctuary was in a positively filthy condition owing to the pigeons which here, as in other climes, seem to have a special licence to inhabit sacred places. To the casual observer this Mihrab and the wall in which it was, seem to be covered with the most lovely tiles of all colours and patterns, but a narrow examination exposes the fact that they are not tiles at all, though the surface has been cunningly glazed to represent tiles. How this has been done exactly it is not easy to say. I picked up in old Merv some bits of glazed bricks that had fallen from an old building, and found that these beautiful colours

* The mihrab is the niche, orientated towards Mecca, universal in mosques.

could be peeled off with one's finger-nail from the sun-dried brick beneath.

One more "lion" and our sight-seeing was finished; this was the Righistan or market-place at the north-western end of the town. Covering the whole available space are stalls or booths, some of them protected from the sun by the most picturesque awnings which look like old umbrellas for which their owners have no further use; others again are shaded by bits of matting held out by means of a stick at an angle. Every conceivable thing connected with man's daily wants is here exposed for sale, and one might spend many an hour watching the *va et vient* of the native people as they chaffer and bargain over every farthing's worth that is bought and sold. Frowning high over the stalls rises the Ark or citadel with its great gateway surmounted by the clock, said to have been made by an Italian in exchange for his own life. An attempt to enter this fortress was quickly stopped by some guards, who with many gesticulations hustled me back down the causeway leading up to it. The Ark of Bokhara was, I think, the only place, with the exception of the fortress of Samarcand, which was not thrown open to us during our visit. In the

case of Samarcand the reason given was that it was undergoing rebuilding or repair, but here in Bokhara no reason whatever was forthcoming. Perhaps it was thought better not to admit us into the place

THE RIGHISTAN AND GATEWAY OF THE ARK OF BOKHARA

where our first question would naturally be, "Where were our poor countrymen, Stoddart and Conolly, shut up?" No objection was made, however, to our visiting the Zindan or prison, outside the Ark, where criminals could be seen with their chains

round their arms and legs; but after all the most interesting sight-seeing is not so much mosques, medresses and citadels as the people themselves and their haunts, and so for the rest of my stay in Bokhara I devoted myself to wandering up and down the bazaars. There are certain things which are common to all eastern bazaars, but Bokhara, like every other place, has its specialities, and we were not long in discovering what these were. The first of these was the hat bazaar, where are sold all manners and kinds and colours of little skull caps which are worn under the turban. These caps are exposed for sale on little sticks, which like porcupine's quills protrude from the walls and give a very curious appearance to the bazaar. Since returning to England I have been told that the difference in these caps is not due to fashion or fancy, but that each village or district has its own distinguishing pattern.

Not far from the caps is found the boot bazaar. Here are exposed for sale the rough brown leather riding boots with the hooked heels and sharp-pointed toes; also close by are the leather riding-trousers stained a madder colour and embroidered with silk; again a little further up to the right is the jewellers'

street, where may be bought the most fascinating gold bracelets, earrings, necklaces, and so on, all studded with turquoises or bejewelled with the native blue and red and yellow stones which are found not very far from Bokhara. Further on you are tempted to buy the most magnificent velvet saddle-cloths embroidered with gold and silver, and hard by are the saddles and bridles and horse furniture, a mass of turquoises and gold and silver plates.

If you have been tempted by the Khalats or striped coloured robes of the natives, a hundred merchants are ready to supply you with the most gorgeous creations of colour that the mind of the Eastern has invented. It was only on my last morning that I discovered the brass bazaar, which is some little way off from the others, but here the work is as good and original as any that is to be seen in Cairo, Damascus or Constantinople. I give a photograph of a specimen I ventured to buy, and also one of the water-pipes such as the natives smoke in these parts. I bought the one represented in

Samarcand from the old fellow who was walking about with it offering it to drosky drivers and other apparently stray people, who solemnly took one or perhaps two draws from it, and then as solemnly handed it back to its owner. I failed to discover on what system this co-operative pipe-smoking was worked, but as far as I could gather, these pipe-owners do not carry their wares round for charity, but expect an occasional present for supplying the needs of others. My pipe was once covered with turquoises which have now almost entirely disappeared, and it is remarkable in having six small legs on which it stands. I saw no other like it in this respect. While on the subject of pipes, I must here mention the green powdered tobacco of which the natives use so much in Bokhara and Samarcand. They are very fond of this and chew it; they carry it about in little gourds with stoppers made of some bright cloth stuff, and they keep them in their belts.

The first two days of our stay we lunched as guests of the Emir in the Ambassador's house,

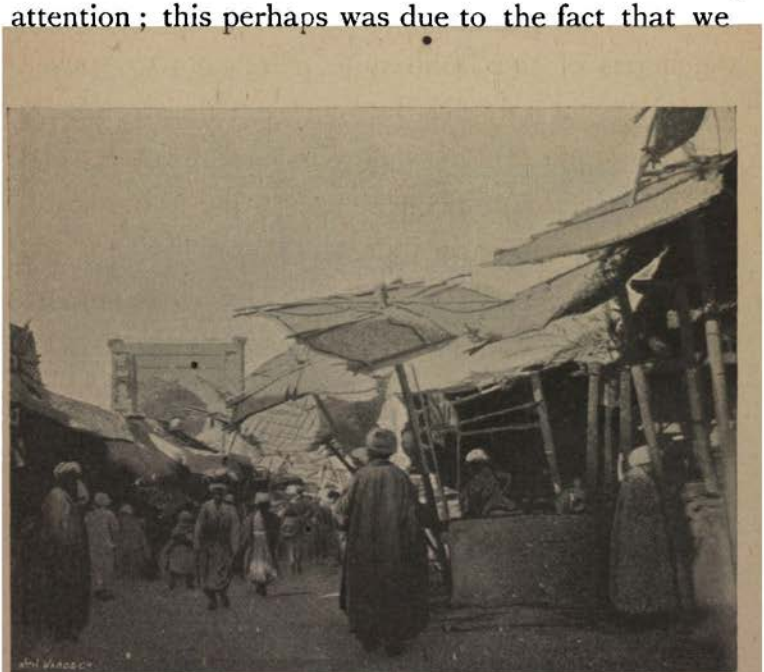
or Eltchi Khaneh, which is kept up for the reception and entertaining of strangers. Theoretically, and indeed practically up to the time of writing, all travellers in his dominions are guests of the Emir, but if many parties like ours are to visit him in the future his Highness may perhaps have to abandon this immemorial Eastern custom! With the exception of having nothing to drink except tea our luncheon was a sumptuous one, though what exactly each successive dish contained it would be difficult for a European to say, but what was set before us was deliciously cooked, and we always concluded our repast with luscious melons and divers sorts of sweetmeats. In the room in which we had our lunch there was a bed, which on inquiry proved to be the resting-place of a French lady who was returning to Paris after a round through Siberia and China and Thibet, through which inhospitable regions she had travelled absolutely alone! Her book, when she publishes it, ought to be exceedingly interesting. Madame Massieu—such was the French lady's name—told us that our arrival had so agitated the bazaars that she had given up trying to purchase anything as long as we were in Bokhara.

The prices of an Eastern bazaar are very easily influenced by trifles. Last year a crowd of tourists in Damascus sent up the prices fourfold. Here in far-away Bokhara a flight of Englishmen raised the hopes of the Bokhariote merchants to such a pitch that not only did they augment their prices by at least 25 per cent., but they refused to condescend to bargain with the infidel!—a sore trial to the latter, who had heard great things of these bazaars and what was to be bought there. For instance, we were told that for good and genuine weapons Bokhara was unexcelled. Three or four miserable little places with a paltry array of knives and rust-eaten muskets constituted all we could find in this line, and the prices for this rubbish were prohibitive; so too with other articles of commerce such as skins, jewellery and silks.

While we were at lunch on the first day we received a visit from an official sent by the Minister of Finance to inquire after our comfort, and we had great pleasure in sending back what must have been to him a satisfactory reply!

Considering we were by far the largest number of Europeans ever seen in Bokhara, it was wonderful how little attention we attracted. Of course one,

always allows something for Oriental impassivity, but even so I must confess that I am surprised how little we seemed to excite the native curiosity or attention; this perhaps was due to the fact that we



IN BOKHARA: MEDRESSE AND MARKET

broke up into groups of three or four; had we proceeded round in one big band the effect might have been different. This would, however, have been quite impossible owing to the narrowness of the alley-ways, which are always crowded not only by

pedestrians but by long strings of magnificent camels and by the great two-wheeled country carts or Arbahs whose wheels have a diameter of nearly eight feet. One had often to take refuge from these and such-like terrors on the narrow ledge in front of the little shops. It was during one of these enforced pauses in our progress that I first noticed the wooden lintels of the shops. An ordinary shop is not much bigger than five feet high by six to eight feet in length, and the carving on the frame-work is very quaint and well worthy of notice. In the more modern parts of the bazaar there is an absence of carving, but in the older part every shop has the posts and lintel more or less carved, generally with a kind of herring-bone pattern.

I noticed that all the asses had their noses slit right up. On inquiry why this was done I was informed they could breathe more easily or, in other words, did not get "pumped" so soon as they would otherwise do! Also the noses of the camels were treated in a peculiar way by having iron or wooden pegs thrust through them, to one end of which is attached a cord by which their master leads them or by which they are attached to the tail of the preceding camel if in a string. This is in accordance

with some precept in the Koran—at least so my informant averred.

The drive home each night seemed very long. The moon was high in the heaven as we sped along about 5 P.M. out through the city gates and past the cemetery on the left, which rises above the long row of low houses in front, while the horse-tails raised aloft on poles over the graves of saint or great man looked ghostly in the waning light, and the world seemed generally to have gone to bed with the sun. They have early closing in Bokhara. Nearly every shop was shut by 4 P.M.

We dined in the station. In honour of our using the restaurant they had cleaned it up a bit, and all the floors had been washed with petroleum. In Baku they water the streets with it occasionally, but the flavour of one's dinner is scarcely improved by it.

It was on our last morning that I got my hurried peep into the Jew's synagogue. One enters it almost immediately from the street, only a narrow passage-way dividing the street wall from the sacred precincts. On entering one sees on one's left a white marble table with two candles on it, exactly like an altar of the Greek church. It

was all covered over with cloths and coverings of leather, and there was some rough carving on the back. The floor of the place was covered with matting; there were many niches in one of the walls

GOING TOWNWARDS, BOKHARA

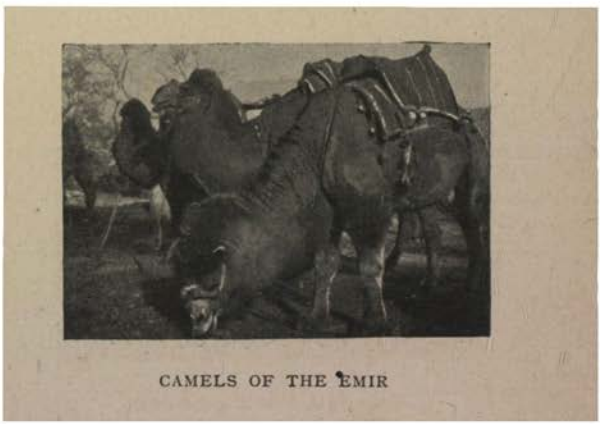
which contained old Torahs, while on another side was a row of niches for the slippers of the Jews. The room was a lofty one, the roof being held up by carved wooden poles, and the ceiling was also of wood. On looking round I observed that there was a room on my left containing another of these altars,

while on my right were visible two more altars, making a row of four in all, while upstairs I understood that there were two more to be found, though I had not time to visit them. The principal disability a Bokhara Jew labours under is that he is not allowed to ride through the bazaar but must walk, a slight burden to bear compared with olden-time rigour. I recognised among their number some evidently from Yemen who, I presume, were here for trading purposes. I can only regret now that I did not give more time to even a hasty study of what is a most interesting subject.

Arrangements had been made for us to see the Emir's Palace on this our last morning. The Emir himself does not like his capital, and he has not been near it for more than two years, but the Emir's Palace was thrown open for us owing to the kind offices of Mons. de Klemm, who was formerly Political Agent here. It lies about two miles from the east gate of the city, and is quite a curiosity.

We drove up to the front door between mud walls into a courtyard full of camels, and shaded by fine trees. Leaving the carriage we were conducted through mean doors in the wall and entered

a deserted courtyard with the remains of a pool in the centre. Entering the palace we wandered through a labyrinth of gaudy little rooms connected by winding narrow passages. The wall-paper is of the bright common pattern usual in cottages in England fifteen years ago; the floors are matted,



CAMELS OF THE EMIR

and over this matting are spread the carpets which are now rolled up in almost every room. The garden, surrounded by a high mud wall, must be lovely in spring and summer time; the paths are arcaded with vines, cool pools of water abound, while great elms and mulberry trees help to keep off the glare of the sun. The throne-room is the best room in the palace, and is fitted for electric light! We had a cup of tea in this gorgeous place instead of the

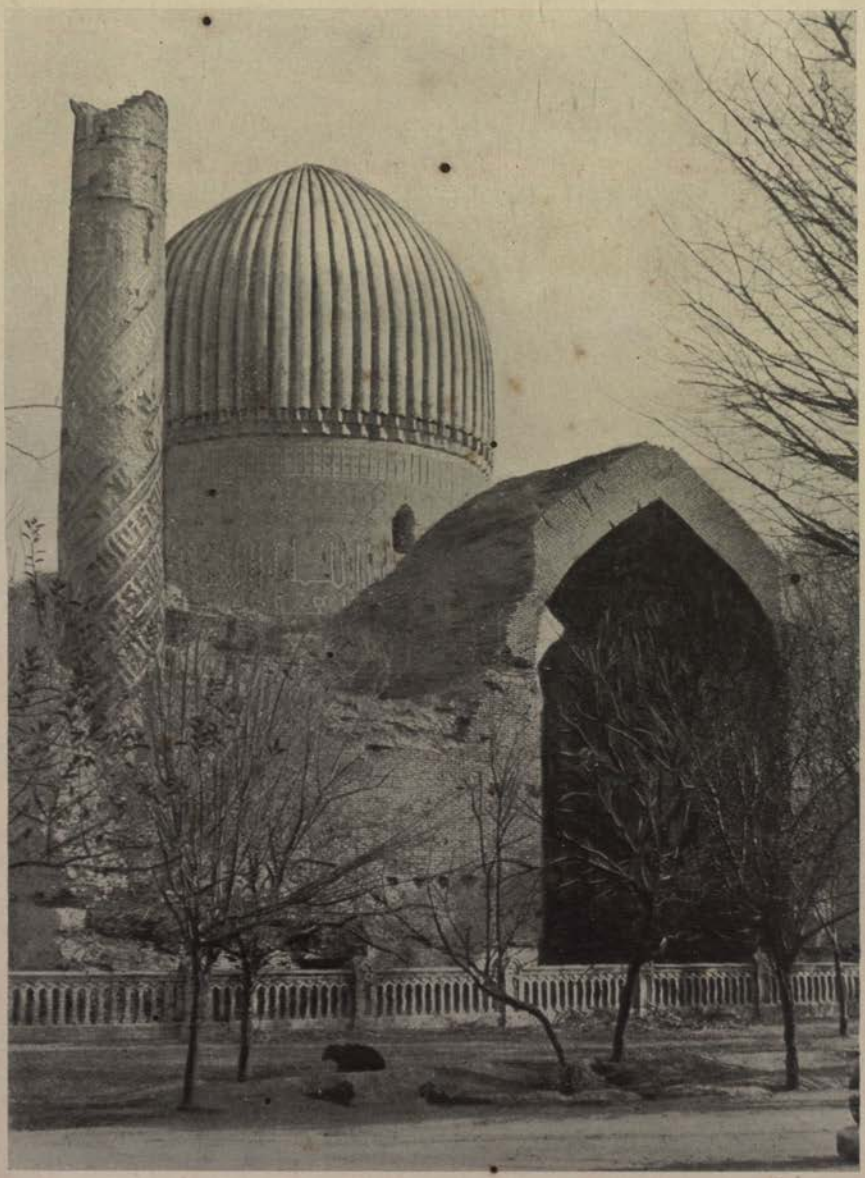
lunch we had been looking forward to, and after inspecting the collection of mechanical and other toys, left the palace, eager to get back to our train, where, as we were not expected, we had to make the best of "zakuska" for all our meal!

The State of Bokhara is a most fertile one; every

THE EMIR'S THRONE-ROOM

year there are two harvests of wheat; three of oats, the third crop being cut green; and four or even five of lucern. Unfortunately it seems to be indisputable that the fertile parts are gradually being encroached upon by the shifting sands of the desert, and if this goes on without being arrested the result will be very disastrous to Bokhara. The fertility of the soil is at present owing entirely to the waters of the Zerafshan river, which are distributed over the

country by irrigation works. As this flows into Bokhara from Russian territory it would be no difficult thing for the Russians to reduce Bokhara to a state of destitution by damming the river higher up. The Emir pays twice a year a subsidy to the Russians for their irrigation works, by which of course Bokhara benefits, but this payment in the eyes of the common people has only a political aspect, and they are firmly convinced that it is nothing more nor less than the Emir's tribute as a vassal to the Czar. Of course the Emir would deny this, and so would the Russians, but it often happens that all the skilful explanations and excuses of diplomatists fail entirely to blind the understanding of the common people, who know when to call a spade a spade.



TOMB OF TAMERLANE, SAMARCAND.

CHAPTER VIII

SAMARCAND

We arrived in Samarcand, the present terminus* of the Transcaspian railway, on Friday, December 3. As at Bokhara, the town is some distance from the station, though the drive to the Righistan is not more than five miles. The scenery round Samarcand is a welcome relief after the miles of flatness we traversed since leaving the Kopet Dagh. Our first duty was, as usual, to call on the Governor. As we had no wish to be seen driving through the town at 10 o'clock in the morning in our evening clothes, with a further prospect of driving back to the train to change an hour later, we packed up what was

* While this is in the press comes the news of the opening of the line to Andijan.

necessary in hand-bags, thinking we could easily get a room in a hotel in the town wherein to change. This however proved to be no easy matter, as there did not seem to be a vacant room in any hotel in Samarcand. At last, after a long search, we found what we wanted, and proceeded in due course to pay our call. The Governor is General Feodoroff, and he had only been in the saddle three days when we arrived. He had nevertheless commissioned one of his officers, a Captain Thérémin, to be our aide-de-camp during our stay, though otherwise we had no official recognition from those in authority in Samarcand. This however was, I think, due to the fact I have just mentioned, that the Governor had barely taken over the reins of government. Samarcand forms part of the government of Turkestan, whose headquarters are at Tashkend, so we were no longer under the ægis of our kind friend and protector, General Kouropatkine, we having left his government on entering the dominions of the Emir, who comes under the political influence of Russia through Tashkend, and not through Ashabad. Still, as long as we inhabited the train we were clients of the Governor of Transcaspia, because, as I mentioned earlier in

this history, the Governor of Transcaspia has control of the line as far as Samarcand. One thing, indeed, for which we have to express our hearty thanks to General Feodoroff was his permission for our train to proceed over the as yet unopened line towards Tashkend, but of this I will speak further on.

Samarcand is richer in historical monuments than Bokhara, but even here there is nothing which dates further back than the fourteenth century. What boots it now that Afrosiab was its founder, far back in the mythical ages? Of the Marcanda of the Greeks, of traces of Alexander the Great, of evidence of the Arab invasion of the eighth century, of the influence of Jenghiz Khan in the thirteenth, nought now remains; but of Timur, the traveller may still see the tomb and the monument he erected to the memory of his Chinese wife, which have survived the centuries of vicissitude when Samarcand became the apple of discord for which China and Bokhara ceaselessly struggled. Thirty years ago, in 1868, it passed finally under the sceptre of the Czar, who wrenched it from the feeble grasp of the then Emir of Bokhara.

The drive from the station is a more interesting

one than it was at Bokhara. After traversing some distance on the level, past houses, caravanserais and cultivated fields, one gradually begins an ascent through long avenues of poplars, whose roots are

THE MEDRESSE OF ULUG BEG, SAMARCAND

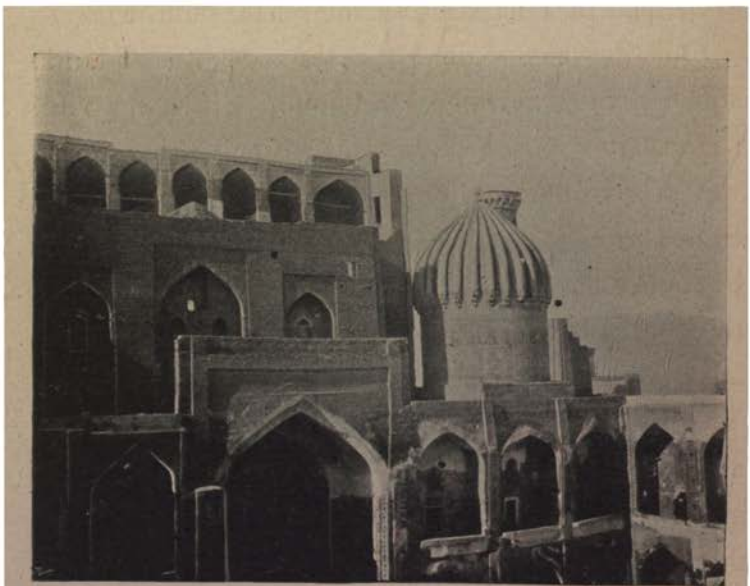
watered on both sides of the road by never failing runlets of water, into the Russki Gorod or Russian town. The streets here are broad and well laid out, there are public gardens and handsome boulevards, the chief of which is called after General Abramoff, whose name is associated with the capture of the

city. Looking up or down these long-drawn avenues one sees lovely views of purple hills or snow-capped mountains beyond, and like the Federal capital of another continent, Samarcand is a "city of magnificent distances."

In spring or in "leafy June" Samarcand must be a delightful spot. Situated as it is 2150 feet above sea level, the heat of the sun is tempered by the cool breezes which blow from the surrounding mountains, while the trees give their pleasant shade to the passers-by in the street; and the roads can easily be watered from the runlets on each side. We saw how this was done during our visit: boys or men with bare legs waded up and down the channels with large wooden shovels with which they liberally besprinkled the dusty streets.

Forming a connecting link between the Russian and the native town is the Gur Emir or tomb of Timur, who made Samarcand the capital of his dominions. It is in a very ruinous condition, and in a few years the minaret will probably have ceased to exist. The building which covers the tomb is however in a rather better state of preservation. The cenotaph of Timur, which is covered with an account of his life in Arabic, lies immediately under

the centre of the dome, and is a plain slab of jade which I measured very carefully. It is 15¾ inches broad, 76¼ long, while it varies from 16½ inches at the base to 17½ inches at the head in depth. It



VIEW OF INTERIOR OF MEDRESSE OF SHIR DAR, SAMARCAND

is said to be the largest piece of jade in the world. The mausoleum contains other tombs beside this of Timur, such as his tutor's, and a low rail of alabaster runs round the group of slabs in the middle. To see the actual tombs one must descend into the vault below, where the dead lie in exactly

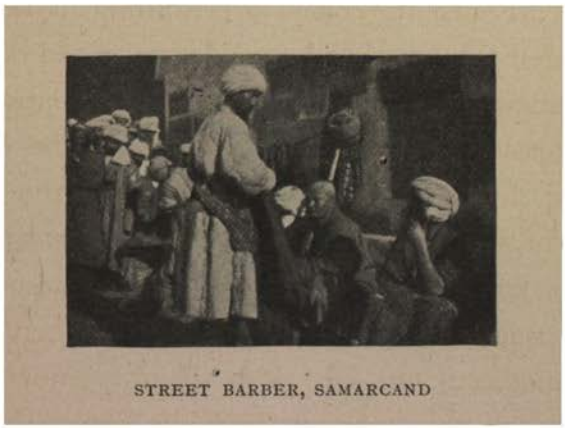
the same order as their cenotaphs indicate above. Thence we wended our way to the Righistan, with its triple glory of the medresses of Ulug Beg on the west, built in 1430, of Shir Dar on the east, built in 1601, and of Tilla Kari on the north, built in 1618.

Our droskies halted on the open side of the square, which is lined by booths occupied by fruit sellers, and, pushing our way through the crowd, we entered under the lofty portal of the medresse of Shir Dar. We crossed the courtyard and ascended by a very narrow and steep staircase to the level of the roof, whence we proceeded still higher to the apex of the arch which overlooks the market-place. The panorama from this lofty position was magnificent. North, south, and east were snow-capped mountains; only on the west was there a break in the rampart that surrounds Samarcand. The middle distance was filled with undulating ground covered with trees and buildings, while immediately before us on the north-east lay the mighty ruins of the mosque of Bibi Khanum, the fair Chinese wife of Timur, whose ruins towered over the booths and mud houses clustered round its base; while further to the east, half hidden among the trees, was to be seen the glint from the blue-tiled domes of the most

beautiful mosque in Central Asia—that of Shah Zindeh, whose real name was Al Mottalib, one of the companions of the Prophet. The building was erected by Timur over the reputed site of the saint's grave. In the opposite direction was visible the ribbed cupola of the Gur Emir, while immediately below us was the busy, ever-shifting crowd that thronged the market-place. As we gazed down on this animated scene we could see the groups sitting in circles round the story-tellers, and the barbers plying their trade under the shadow of the mighty walls of the medresse ; and in another part squatting on the flags was a row of pipe and tobacco sellers with their wares spread out before them. We lingered long on our giddy height enjoying the beauty of the scenery, and the interesting and fascinating scene of the market-place below us.

So much has been already written of the remains of the city that I do not propose to say anything further on the subject here. The recent earthquake has left its mark everywhere, and in a few years—it cannot well be longer—there will hardly be left anything of antiquarian interest in Samarcand. It is all very well for irresponsible writers to decry the Russian authorities, and say they have no care

for the historic buildings of which they are now the guardians, but it only needs the most casual glance to assure oneself that these buildings are practically past restoration or repair. Whatever may have been the case a hundred years ago, patching now would be quite useless in my opinion



STREET BARBER, SAMARCAND

—everything is too far gone. Then again the recurrence of earthquakes, the last only in September 1897, would at once destroy again what had been restored, and the money spent would have been only wasted. It is curious to see how these Mohammedan builders of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries wrought. To begin with, everything is of brick. Then this beautiful enamel work of turquoise blue, dark blue, and white, which is the glory of

these mosques, medresses and tombs, does not structurally form part of the design at all. The whole of the colour was put upon a screen which was in some way fastened to the outer wall. This is evident from seeing things as they now are, for this screen has in most places disappeared, while in others it is still to be seen bulging out from the side walls of the buildings. Nor were enamelled tiles used to any large extent. These were necessary in places, but here as elsewhere in work of the same character the effect is produced by a sort of mosaic, and what appear tiles at a distance, at a close observation turn out to be small pieces of brick of various sizes and colours fitted into and set in the damp mortar in the necessary patterns. I have already noticed the prevalence of blue—the domes are mostly, or *were* mostly, of the lovely turquoise colour, the arches and pillars are covered with dark and light blue, mixed with a very little white, and one never sees any other colour at all, except perhaps yellow, but this very sparingly.

All the minaret towers of Samarcand are out of the perpendicular. Every traveller mentions this fact and accounts for it in his own way. There are three views on the subject: (1) that the towers are

MOSQUE OF BIBI-KHANUM, SAMARCAND.

not out of the perpendicular, their apparent divergence being only an optical illusion; (2) their architects intended them to lean; (3) earthquakes have forced them out. Now dismissing (1) as in my humble opinion untenable; (2) has in its favour that two medresses in the Righistan have their fronts flanked each by two towers, which apparently lean outwards at a symmetrical angle from their central arch. I say *apparently*, for there was no means at hand to measure exactly. All that I can aver is, that the connecting wall between the arch and the towers shows no sign of ever having been wrenched or mended in any way. On the other hand, (3) can find support in single towers, such as that belonging to the Gur Emir. Personally I do not pretend to give an opinion on the subject, beyond being convinced that the optical illusion theory will not hold water.

We visited the tomb of Daniel, which is situated about two miles from the Righistan towards the north-east. It lies in a picturesque ravine going down to the Zerafshan river. The tomb itself is sixty feet long, and has been recently vaulted over. It was adorned at the head with goats' horns, though what the meaning of this curious decoration was I

did not discover, though I had observed it on other tombs. The Mohammedans have a legend that Daniel would go on growing after his death, so they added a little to his tomb every year. Considering sixty feet was long enough for any saint, the tomb had now been finished definitely and walled in at both ends. Looking down from the ledge on which the tomb is built, the river is seen below with two mills being turned by it; on the flat roof of one of these was a man winnowing corn in the most primitive fashion by throwing it into the air with a shovel.

There were other things we saw in Samarcand besides ruins and architectural remains. We were shown over an orphanage in the Russki Gorod which was supported by voluntary contributions, though it was not a large one, the numbers being limited to thirty. What struck me most about it was that the inmates were not compelled to wear any uniform, a very unusual thing in Russia. The boys are kept here till they are seven years of age, and the girls either till they are placed in service or get married. The chief of police of Samarcand is also governor of this orphanage, but it was evident from the happy faces of the boys and girls that the

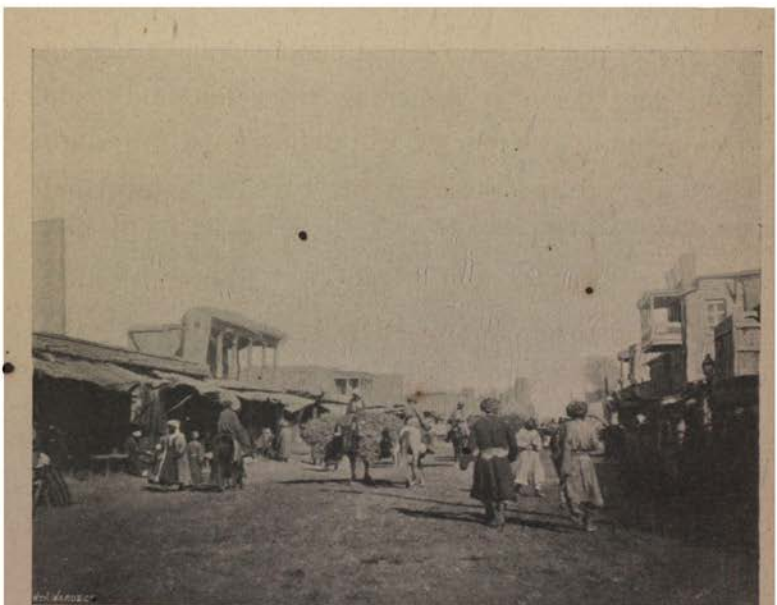
iron of discipline had by no means entered into their souls.

We were also taken to see an embryonic museum, at present housed in a small room near the church. A good deal of the space is taken up by natural history specimens, but there are also some interesting Christian remains, while close by the door was an enormous block of coal, brought from the neighbouring mountains, where there is an almost inexhaustible supply; but as long as there is no metal ore to be worked the coal will lie idle, because oil is more economical as a traction fuel for the railway.

In the native town we saw silk and plush factories. All the work was done by hand, and it was interesting to notice that the beautiful patterns which we had observed were not wrought on the loom, but were produced by being dyed on the woof. Some one suggested that these dyes were no longer the old vegetable dyes which gave such remarkable brilliance and permanence to the colours, but that they were modern aniline dyes. I inquired, through an interpreter, whether this was so, but the imputation was indignantly denied.

The wine of Samarcand is justly celebrated; and

here, as at Tiflis, the Russians are taking the matter up seriously, and we saw some large *caves* where the whole process of wine-making was being carried on most scientifically. The white wines are much



STREET SCENE, SAMARCAND

superior to the red, here as elsewhere. We tasted some Lacrima Christi, but, unlike the modern Italian wine of that name, it was heavy and sweet, though the flavour was delicious.

The most interesting visit we made in modern

Samarcand was to the prison. We entered through great wooden gates into a large compound, and proceeded straight in front of us to a long low building about two hundred yards away. Keeping round to the left of this we entered by a door at the back, and we soon found ourselves in the centre of a long corridor stretching from left and right. Immediately in front of the door was a large sort of cage, and here prisoners are brought to see their friends and relations, who may bring them little presents. We inspected one or two of the rooms, which seemed full of convicts to their utmost capacity. One room we entered contained about fifteen Tartars, all of whom, we were informed, were murderers. They had chains round their legs and waists. They did not appear to be in any way depressed by their position; on the contrary, they seemed anxious for us to know all about them, and produced their cards, on which was a record of their evil doings, for us to see. Each prisoner has a wooden bed to sleep on, and the rooms are lofty and airy; and I was agreeably surprised to find that the fifteen Tartar murderers did not leave an offensive smell in one's nostrils! Although ladies were not supposed to enter within the

precincts of the prison, yet two or three enterprising members of our party managed to join their male companions in this inspection, and the Russian officers were too polite to turn them out. The night before we left Samarcand I saw a large gang of these convicts on the platform; they were being sent to Siberia by way of Odessa. They are put into prison vans on the railway, and taken across the Caspian and over the Caucasus and across the Black Sea to Odessa, whence they are shipped to Vladivostock. I inspected one of these prison vans, and found nothing that a humanitarian could object to in them. They are in fact very much like an old-fashioned third-class carriage, with the additional luxury of a lavatory. It was pathetic to see that in some cases their wives and children were voluntarily following the prisoners into exile. There are two degrees of a Siberian exile. One is condemnation to the mines—this is the most terrible punishment, and often means death; the other is enforced colonisation — as agriculturists and so on—and it would probably be the latter class of convicts who would be accompanied by their wives and children. We naturally inquired what rations the prisoners had, and learned that each man had

daily two pounds of bread and a basin of soup. Even this some of them must have found too much, if one might judge from the pile of crusts we saw in the prison rooms.

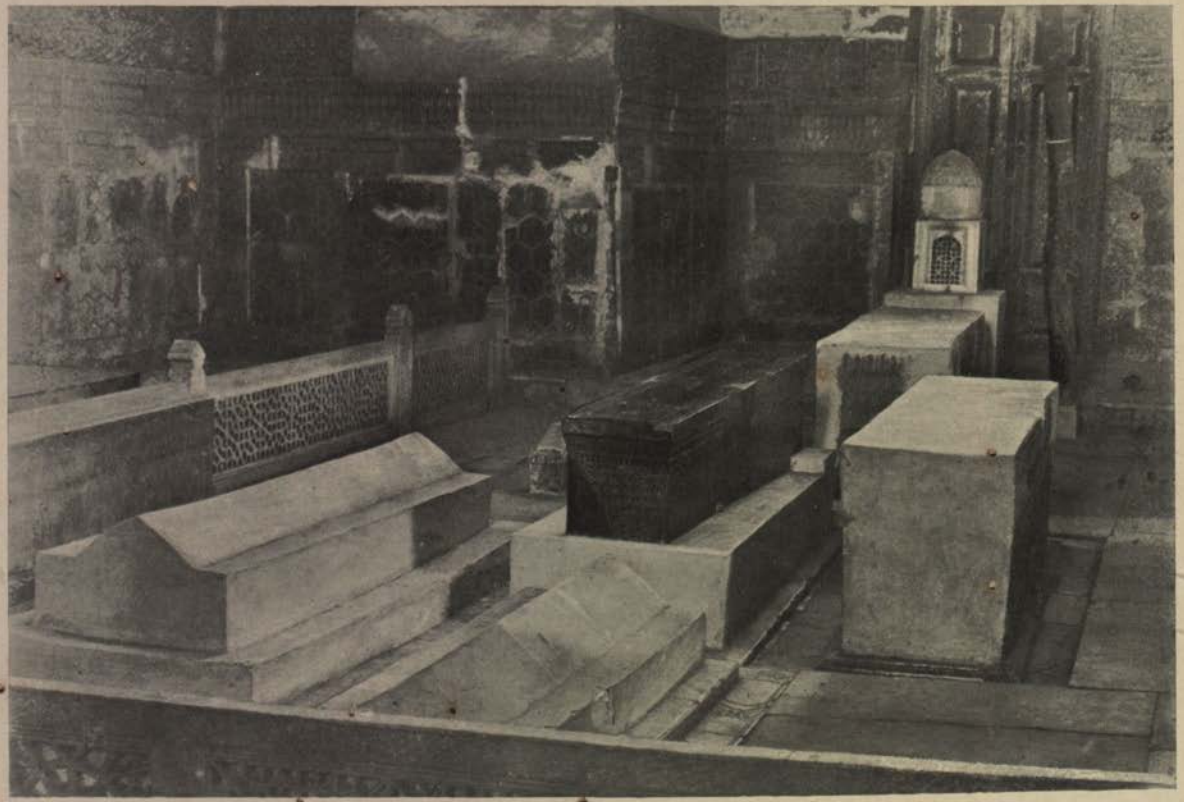
The bazaars of Samarcand are very different from those of Bokhara. With the exception of one small circular building, from which radiate all the streets of the native quarter, the bazaars of Samarcand are not covered in at all, but, like European shops, give on to the thoroughfare. Nor do the bazaars of Samarcand compare at all favourably with those of Bokhara, except perhaps the silk bazaar; and those who wish to do shopping are strongly recommended to do it rather in Bokhara than in Samarcand. A speciality of Samarcand seems to be the curious painted wooden saddles, but their bulkiness prevented one from purchasing them. There is one thing that is well worth spending money upon, and that is the wonderfully beautiful Bokhara embroidery which is to be found here as well as at Bokhara. It has the merit of being absurdly cheap as well as very good. I bought one piece of silk, embroidered all over, about two yards square, for eight shillings, and another piece, big enough for the portiere of an ordinary-sized

door, for five shillings. The advantage of this sort of purchase is that it is so easy to pack up. The same remark applies to the coins and rings of the Græco-Bactrian era, which are not difficult to procure here.

The only thing of interest in Samarcand which we were unable to see was the Koktash, or coronation stone of the Timurid dynasty. This stone is now in the Citadel, and we were informed that as the Citadel was undergoing repair we could not be admitted there.

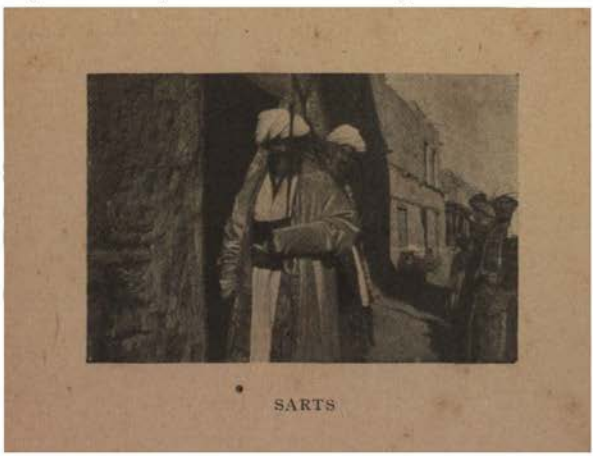
The native population of Samarcand is mainly Sarts, which is the name given to the town dwellers of the native races; and the difference between them and the Bokhariotes is very marked, the latter having the distinct advantage in a comparison.

The last day of our stay we made our excursion up the Zerafshan valley over the new line. We were the first English party to use it, but three Americans had already been there before us! The line goes through a deep cutting after leaving the station, and is very well laid. From Samarcand to Tashkend we are on a Government railway, and no longer on the military railway, which suffered somewhat from the haste in which it was laid. We pass



THE CENOTAPH OF TAMERLANE, SAMARCAND.

on the right, not far from the line, the tomb which is visible to the east from Samarcand. Its dome is still covered in parts with the invariable turquoise-blue enamel. It is a mosque-tomb of one Tschopan Atha, meaning Father of the Shepherds. There worship the shepherds of the neighbourhood. Pre-



SARTS

sently we see the waters of the Zerafshan on the left, and not long after we emerge into the valley of the Zerafshan. The low mountains in the north-east are the Godoun Taou range. They drop into the plain to the east, where their place is taken by the much more lofty and picturesque range of the Zerafshan mountains, whose crests are sprinkled with snow. From Samarcand both these ranges are plainly visible.

The best view of one of the most fertile valleys of the world is obtained from the point where the railway crosses the river on its temporary wooden bridge twelve versts from Samarcand. Here we made a halt, which enabled us to take our bearings of the valley and also to examine a very fine brick bridge supposed to have been built by Timur for the purpose of in some way dividing the waters of the river. Now it stands high and dry, looking very quaint, at some distance from the present river-bank. There were probably originally one or more others joined to it at an angle for the purpose of diverting the river into two main streams. The bridge itself is worthy of the old Roman builders, so solid is it, so hard its concrete! Its height from the ground to the point of the arch is ninety-five feet, and it has the same width at the bottom. While the train is halting we pick up a few facts about the line from the engineers who accompany us. The new iron bridge to replace the temporary wooden one is to be 660 yards long. At present there is not one piece of this iron bridge on the spot, but it will be finished in four months! By this time the railway is finished as far as Khokand, and the rate of laying the rails is five versts a day; so by the

end of 1898 everything will be finished as far as Tashkend, 346 versts from Samarcand on the one side, and as far as Andijan, which is 494 versts

TIMUR'S BRIDGE, ZERAFSHAN VALLEY

away, on the other. The junction for these two termini is Chavast, 170 versts from Samarcand.

The river ran rapidly at our feet—a glacier colour almost, now confined to a narrow channel; but in spring it is easy to see that the water covers a width of two versts, with a maximum depth in ordinary years of about twenty feet. Salmon and carp are

caught in its waters. The alluvial valley of the Zerafshan is about eighty versts across at its widest, and it of course owes its far-famed fertility and luxuriance to its water, which even so near its source is already very considerably tapped by canals for irrigation. After the train had proceeded about a mile beyond the bridge, some of us took our guns and walked for about an hour, and we then had evidence of the careful way in which the water was distributed over this richest of alluvial soils, making it a veritable Garden of Eden. The Russians succeeded to a pleasant heritage when they relieved the Emir of Bokhara of the trouble of collecting the taxes here in 1868. This occupation of the upper waters of the life-giving Zerafshan places Bokhara entirely at the mercy of Russia, for without water Bokhara would soon become a waste, and she gets water only from the Zerafshan.

The total bag of the four sportsmen amounted to one sparrow-hawk! On our way back we halted on the bridge and watched the evening close in; and then, when the landscape was fast fading, once more entered the train, and reached Samarcand about five o'clock. The day had been overcast, and for the first time this side of the Caspian rain fell.

CHAPTER IX

SAMARCAND TO ASHABAD

We left Samarcand on the evening of the Monday, homeward bound, and we were only to halt twice more on this side of the Caspian again—at Ashabad, to accept a special invitation General Kouropatkine had given us to assist at the celebration of the military festival of St. George; and at Kizil Arvat, to inspect the engineering works of the Transcaspian railway.

Shortly after breakfast on the Tuesday morning, we passed on our left a very fine specimen of a fortified mound called Shah Islam. It was surmounted by walls of mud and towers of mud, and looked quite mediæval with its battlements and crenelations. Unfortunately it was too far off

to photograph, and out of the question to stop the train, or I should very much have liked to have been able to reproduce it here. An hour later we passed on the right the ruins of old Bokhara, fast disappearing under the shifting sand-hills which we could plainly see against the sky line. Half an hour more and we cross our old friend the Zerafshan, whose influence we soon miss as we enter into a land of desolation—those shifting sand dunes which look for all the world like the billowy waves of a restless ocean. For an hour we sped on through this monotonous scenery, realising for the first time how subject the line must be to be engulfed, and how puerile the attempts to ward off the dangers must be, with such poor makeshifts as sticks and matting, which themselves so soon get lost to sight under the ever accumulating sand. Once more we crawl over the bridge across the Oxus and halt a short time again in Amou-Daria. Here we are met by an emissary from the Beg of Tchardjoui bearing his photographs wrapped up in silk for those ladies of the party to whom he had promised them on the way out. It is evident he thought more of the English visitors than he did of his own wives, because when a lady asked him if

she might be taken to see them, he replied in a casual way that they weren't worth seeing!

For three weary hours after leaving Amou-Daria, where we had fortified ourselves by a plentiful purchase of delicious melons, we ploughed through the sand dunes. When first the line was laid, the winds from the north and north-west used to blow the sand under the rails and lift them up; to obviate this, clay was used to keep the ballast in place; this idea is said to have occurred to the *wife* of one of the engineers! This difficulty overcome, there still remained the fact that the wind would blow the sand over the line into little hillocks. Nature always has its antidote at hand for everything poisonous, and as the dock and the nettle grow side by side, so is found growing in the sand, striking its roots far down, a tree-like shrub called the Saxaoul. This has now been planted all along the line, and has effectually prevented the rails being covered with sand. At one time it was thought this valuable shrub could not be propagated, but nurseries have now been established at Tchardjoui and other places along the line where it is carefully reared, to be transplanted later on to the sides of the railway. Besides this great protection there is further a ribbon

of wild oats running along both sides, and this is steadily growing into a thick hedge, and so man has triumphed over nature.

The scene suddenly changes from rolling sands to alluvial desert, and so remains till Merv, where we arrived in the evening.

When light returned on Wednesday morning, the Kopet Dagh had the morning's sun on it, while the steppes in front were in dark shadow; and further on, nearer Ashabad, the mountain tops were covered with snow. It was a glorious morning. A few miles from Ashabad the ruins of Annaou are passed on the left. Here are a few mud pillars and walls scattered over the plain, and there is nothing of interest except a fine mosque gateway, with remains of blue tiles thereon, which stands conspicuously on the eminence which was obviously once the citadel.

We arrived at the station at 9 o'clock, by which time most of the gentlemen are in evening dress ready for the great *fête* day of St. George. We start at 10 for the church, and then discover for the first time how heavily it must have been raining the day before. The streets are inches deep in a soupy mortar which splashes up on to our faces

and over our clothes, not improving our appearance.

We only reach the church in time to join the procession out into the square, headed by a lantern and eikons, and by the colours of the regiments drawn up in hollow square outside. After the priests comes the Governor-General, attended by his staff, and then we join in behind. The procession halts by the monument in the centre of the square. Here two carpets are spread, one for the priests and one for the Governor-General, and the open-air part of the service begins, and all bare their heads. The service concludes with the sprinkling of holy water on the colours, on the Governor-General, and on the troops. Then General Kouropatkine receives all the officers and shakes hands with them. After that he pays a visit to those who bear the cross of St. George, but who are no longer actually serving in the army. There are about twenty of these drawn up on the right of the line, and the General has a pleasant word for each.

The military Order of St. George is probably the only democratic institution in Russia. Not even the Czar himself is a member of it. The late Czar was a member of the Order, but only because he had

distinguished himself in action, and as the present Czar has never had an opportunity of serving his country in the field, he is disqualified for membership of the Order. Unlike our V.C. the decoration

PRAYER-TIME

of the Order is only conferred for conspicuous acts of gallantry done under orders. Any unnecessary exposure of life or limb is looked upon with disfavour, and more than one application, for brilliant deeds done before the enemy, has been refused because the soldier or officer acted on his own impulse and not under direct orders from his superior officer. A bronze cross is given to the common

soldier, and a silver one to the officer, but it is quite possible for a man who has been promoted from the ranks to have both the silver and the bronze cross, hanging from a yellow and black ribbon, on his breast at the same time. I should add that there are also grades in the Order, and that it is possible to be promoted from one to another, though this promotion does not annul the lower rank; and an officer of the first division would not for that reason cease to wear the badge of the lower divisions through which he has passed. The distribution of these crosses lies with a Council of the Order, and is, I suppose, the only source of honour in his dominions which does not owe its existence to the Czar himself. General Kouropatkine himself holds the position of what we in England would call Grand Cross of the Order, and on this particular occasion he acted as its head.

At one o'clock the gentlemen of the party found themselves in the reception room of the Governor-General's Palace amid a throng of medalled and decorated warriors. As this was an official function the ladies were not invited. Presently lunch is announced, and we all take our places in the four rooms prepared for us. Some of us sit in the first

room at the General's own table, and the rest of us are placed in the second room with an aide-de-camp to look after us. General Kouropatkine by no means restricted himself to his own room, but

INTERIOR OF A MEDRESSE. ASIATIC AND EUROPEAN MEET

circulated freely among all his guests, making pretence of taking a mouthful of zakuska in each room, and coming round from time to time with his glass and drinking to the health of this or that officer. His breast was one mass of medals and crosses and orders, and he also wore a portrait of

the Shah of Persia set in the most magnificent diamonds, with which that autocrat himself had presented him. For the benefit of those who can read Russian I append the menu and the selection of music that was played by the band during lunch:

THE MENU

завтрака 26-го Ноября 1897 года.

1. Закуска разная.
2. Майонезъ изъ осетрины.
3. Жаркое: индѣйки, фазаны и утки.
4. Салатъ разный.
5. Кремъ.
6. Фрукты.

IN CENTRAL ASIA

THE PROGRAMME OF MUSIC

ПРОГРАММА

МУЗЫКИ ОБЛАСТНАГО ХОРА

на 26-е Ноября 1897 года.

1) Маршъ Скобелевъ . . . . . Ар. Вурмъ.
2) Попурри изъ оп. „Риголетто" . . . . муз. Верди.
4) Маршъ изъ оп. „Тангейзеръ" . . . . муз. Вагнера.
4) Попурри изъ оп. „Гугеноты" . . . . муз. Мейебера.
5) „Souvenir de Hapsal" . . . . . соч Чайковскаго.
6) Антрактъ изъ оп. „Карменъ" . . . . муз. Бизе.
7) Вальсъ „На окраинѣ" . . . . . соч. А. Берсонъ.
8) Мазурка изъ оп. „Жизнь за Царя" . . муз. Глинки.
9) „Осенняя пѣснь" . . . . . соч. Чайковскаго.
10) Вальсъ „Traute Stunden" . . . . . соч Клекнера.
11) Попурри изъ оп. „Русалка" . . . . муз. Даргомыжскаго
11) Маршъ „Аму-Дарья" . . . . . соч. А. Берсонъ.

Although the Emperor is not a member of the Order, nevertheless his health was the first proposed, the band playing the National Anthem, while volleys of cheers almost drowned the music. Next came the toast of the Grand Duke Michael as the oldest and most distinguished member of the Order, then followed the toast of the Knights of the Order, then that of the Governor-General himself, and then that of Madame Kouropatkine, who took her place by her husband's side at the banquet. After each toast General Kouropatkine would go round all the tables in all the rooms attended by his aide-de-camp, Baron von Osten-Sacken, drinking with all his guests, his wife accompanying him when it was her toast that was being honoured. Nor must it be supposed that all this was done with the stiff formality to which we are accustomed in England. Every toast was followed with wild cheers, the clinking of glasses, and the singing in parts of their equivalent to "He is a jolly good fellow." It is remarkable what good voices the Russians have and how easily they seem to drop into harmony when singing. The band, too, always struck up the same refrain as each toast was drunk, with the exception of the Emperor's, which was, of course,

followed by the National Anthem. With Madame Kouropatkine's health I thought that the toast list was concluded, but what was our astonishment to hear that General Kouropatkine in honour of our presence was going to propose the health of our Queen! Those of us who were in the second room now went through into the first in order to hear the General's speech, who in the briefest of sentences called upon his officers to drink to the health of the Queen of England and Empress of India, coupled with that of the British army and nation. I think this incident deserves special mention inasmuch as I should suppose that it is absolutely unique in the history of such a gathering. It is not uncommon to propose the health of a foreign Sovereign at the banquet of an Order of which that foreign Sovereign is a member, or an honorary member, but for the health of our Queen to be drunk at the banquet of the Russian military Order of St. George is, I make bold to state, quite without precedent; and in proposing this toast General Kouropatkine went out of his way to express the cordiality of the Russians towards their English guests in Central Asia. None of us present could forget the fact that up till quite recently it was almost impossible for

any foreigner to visit Central Asia at all, that even now individuals of foreign nations have to go through

GENERAL TSERPITSKY, COMMANDANT IN ASHABAD

endless trouble and difficulty to obtain permission to travel through these regions, and that never before

had a party of tourists such as we were, let alone English tourists, been permitted to travel through Transcaspia, Bokhara, and Turkestan. Here was a great opportunity for making a worthy speech in reply, but I could only express in the fewest words our great appreciation of General Kouropatkine's words, and how proud we were to hear his toast so enthusiastically received by all present, and then all was over. Some of us adjourned afterwards to the hospitable house of General Zerpitsky, who gave us coffee and liqueurs and cigarettes, and fresh toasts were drunk in more bumpers of champagne. The most generous of men, he would not let us depart without presenting us each with handsome gifts in memory of our visit.

The festivities of the day concluded with a concert, followed by a ball in the evening. The concert was instrumental and vocal, and the performers, the majority of whom were officers, were amateurs. The instrumental part was decidedly better than the vocal, though considering where we were it was extraordinarily good for the limited means at disposal.

The following was the programme:

ПРОГРАММА.

КОНЦЕРТЪ

ВЪ АСХАБАДСКОМЪ

ВОЕННОМЪ СОБРАНІИ

26-го Ноября 1897 года.

1) „Вѣнскій маршъ“ Мюллера-Берггауза. .	исп. оркестръ
2) „Отзвуки бала“—вальсъ Наусана . . .	
3) Хоровое пѣніе	исп. хоръ.
4) „Бальныя мечты“ – вальсъ Эйленберга .	исп. оркестръ
5) Увертюра изъ оп. „Маритана“ – Валаса .	

Оркестръ музыкальнаго общества подъ упр. г. Берсона.

Хоръ музыкальнаго общества подъ упр. г. Копанева.

Начало въ 8½ часовъ вечера.

The following morning we left Ashabad and bade our farewells on the platform to the many friends we had met there. The General sent down two bands to play us off, and shortly before the train steamed out of the station his aide-de-camp, Baron von Osten-Sacken, came down with a message wishing us *bon voyage*, and so with great regret we bade farewell to Ashabad and its kind hosts, who had done so much to make our stay so thoroughly enjoyable.

CHAPTER X

ASHABAD TO ODESSA, AND HOME

THE morning after leaving Ashabad we halted for a few hours in a drizzling rain to inspect the railway works of Kizil Arvat. Those of us not interested in engineering stopped on board and listened to the band which had been sent to meet us, and which, regardless of the rain, played selections of music as long as the train remained at the platform.

The following morning we arrived at Krasnovodsk, and went on board the steamer, bidding a hearty farewell to our kind friends Mr. de Klemm and Colonel Brunelli. We had done a pleasant duty to them the night before by drinking their health at dinner, and it was with real regret that we were now obliged to leave them. We waved adieu

to them until the pier was lost to sight, and then settled down on board the steamer for the sixteen hours' crossing, feeling as if we had left quite old friends behind. The rest of our journey home requires but little description. We arrived at Baku on the Sunday morning, and spent the day there, as our train did not leave till the evening. The market was very busy, but was not particularly interesting; but I bought no less than 216 small turquoises for the small sum of ten shillings! The Baku papers had been advised of our arrival, and it was gravely stated that a party of English millionaires was returning from Central Asia to Europe! This was very flattering, no doubt, but taking into consideration the well-known fact of the prevalence of brigandage in the Caucasus, and the further fact that it was no uncommon thing for trains to be "held up," as the Americans say, it was quite possible that we might have been attacked by some of the lawless tribes through which the railway runs. However, we reached Tiflis the following morning without any exciting adventure, and proceeded on to Batoum the same day.

I cannot help thinking that the beauties of the railway journey between Batoum and Tiflis have

been much overrated. It is true that some time after leaving Tiflis the train runs through a fine wide and rich plain, surrounded on all sides by snow-capped mountains; but the scenery is not comparable to that of Switzerland, and is what might without any prejudice be called tame. Reaching Rion, there is a very fine view to the north of the lofty peaks and great snow wall of the Caucasus; and on the south another long chain of snow-capped mountains towards Persia and Armenia. What was noticeable chiefly was the great engineering activity being displayed all along the line. The torrents which run by the side of the railway are being tamed to run in hewn channels, while the line itself is being protected by means of stone embankments. This energy and foresight is due to the remarkable man who is now Minister of Ways and Communications in Petersburg, I mean Prince Hilkof, who at one time worked as an engine-driver in America, and so speaks English perfectly; and who is now engaged in developing with all his energy the railroad system of Russia.

From Tiflis the line follows the left bank of the Koura; after crossing the Suram Pass at a height of about 2500 feet above the sea level, it descends

by the left bank of the river Rion; and it is after crossing this pass that such a marked change in the scenery takes place. We leave behind a region of cold winds, and wide, bare plains, and enter a country thickly wooded and luxuriant, a country bathed in warm moisture nearly all the year round. The line descends through Mingrelia and Imeritia to Batoum, which is one of the most rainy spots on the globe. The Russians are making here an experiment which promises to be successful—that of tea planting—though it is hardly yet sufficiently developed to have any effect on the tea market of Europe.

Although the Russian occupation of the Caucasus tends to destroy to a certain extent the characteristics of the inhabitants, yet there is enough of the picturesque still left to interest the traveller who only gets his glimpse of the people from a train window, or during the frequent halts at the roadside stations.

We arrived at Batoum at night, and proceeded at once on board the boat, sailing next morning for Sevastopol. The voyage round the coast of the Black Sea was prolonged by the many stoppages *en route*. Luckily, however, the weather proved all that could be desired, and we enjoyed to the full the

beauties of the coast scenery. Then, too, there was always the further interest of the embarkation and disembarkation of the various Caucasian types at the different ports of call, with specimens of Crim Tartars in the Crimea later. There is much of interest along this north coast of the Black Sea which would well repay a tour for its own sake, even independently of the associations of the Crimea so dear to an Englishman. It was in the early morning that we entered the port of Yalta, the celebrated Riviera resort, and witnessed one of the finest cloud effects it has ever been my lot to see. The little town nestles at the foot of hills which rise steep behind it to the height of about 1200 feet. On the morning of our arrival we could see the tops of these hills sprinkled with snow, bathed in the unclouded splendour of the early sun, which was rendered invisible to us by reason of a great pall of heavy clouds which hung above our heads. It would have made a splendid picture for the genius of a Turner.

The scenery from Yalta to Chersonesus Point is very fine, but we should have enjoyed it more had it been less cold. We arrived at Sevastopol about midday, and were met by the British Vice-Consul,

who placed his services at our disposal during our stay. Sevastopol was *en fête* for the Emperor's birthday, which was to be celebrated in the evening by a grand ball in the officers' club. To this ball we had received a courteous invitation. In the limited time at our disposal we visited spots which are household words to every Englishman, and we were able to realise in some faint degree how awful the sufferings of our troops must have been from the terrible cold of the Crimean winter. The icy blasts which swept over these bare, bleak uplands was quite enough for us who were warmly clad, and whose faces were protected by the *bashliks* or Russian capotes we had bought in Central Asia, but with snow on the ground and the thermometer many degrees lower one could imagine what terrible privations would have to be undergone by soldiers compelled to bivouac in the open. The ball was the most brilliant affair we had yet attended. The Admiral-in-Chief of the Black Sea himself acted as host. All the officers, civil, military and naval, and all the foreign Consuls were there *en grande tenu*, and the noble ball-room of the Naval Club brilliantly lit by electricity made a most effective scene.

The next morning our party was to break up. Some of us returned to Constantinople, others to Odessa. But it is not easy to leave the dominions of the Czar in a hurry. Every one has to obtain permission from the police authorities before he can return home, and the police authorities of Russia are not always easy to manage. In this particular instance they caused us endless trouble. Unfortunately, we arrived on a *fête* day, and nobody will do any work on a *fête* day in Russia. Then we left on a Sunday, and Sunday is also of course a *fête* day. It took me from 5 P.M. on Saturday to 2 A.M. on Sunday to get the passports put right for those who were going to Constantinople, and in my efforts to obtain this end I had to buttonhole the Chief of Police and the Turkish Consul-General in the ball-room, and it was not till half an hour before the boat sailed for Constantinople that the necessary formalities were completed, and then I was given to understand that a distinct point had been stretched for us. The same difficulty occurred at Odessa, but here our excellent Consul-General has made an arrangement with the Governor by which hurried travellers can get their passports put through in the course of an hour without intervention from the

police. I have mentioned our Consul-General, Colonel Stuart, at Odessa, and I should like to say that here as well as at Batoum and Sevastopol we received every help and courtesy and kindness from our Consuls. Both at Batoum and Odessa I came into close contact with Mr. Stevens and Colonel Stuart, and to both I owe my thanks for the great pains and trouble they were at to assist me in every way, and in assisting me to assist our party generally. I could only wish that the Russian Custom House authorities would allow these two gentlemen to have control of the customs in their respective towns for a short time, and then I think a sadly-needed reform would be inaugurated in the Russian Custom House department. It will have been evident from the preceding pages that I am something of a Russophil, but what I have suffered from the Custom authorities of the Russians would, I feel sure, turn an ordinary man into the most pronounced Russophobe!

We left Odessa by the night train, and travelling straight through to England we reached home on Christmas Eve, after a most eventful journey lasting seven weeks and covering nearly five thousand miles.

In conclusion, I can only repeat what I said in my Preface, that the foregoing pages are merely meant to be a description of a journey that has indeed been made before, but never under such circumstances or with so large a party. Those who wish for the necessary guide-book information must go elsewhere. The bibliography of the Caucasus and Central Asia is much more copious than most people imagine. This has been no attempt to compete with such books as Curzon's or O'Donovan's, or writers such as these, but it is offered rather to our Russian hosts and friends as some slight token of my sense of gratitude for all they did for us, in order that some monument, however humble, might exist recording in how hospitable a manner a party of English people has been received by our traditionary foe in a far-off part of the world where that foe is popularly supposed to be more inveterate and more insidious and more dangerous than anywhere else!

I will not introduce politics here, but the more Englishmen visit Russia the more will our insular prejudice against our great rivals fade away in friendship. There is much that is akin in the natures of the two peoples, and the more they see

of each other the better will it be for both nations. I have done my little share in making Russia better known to the English traveller, and I have done it *con amore*.

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
London & Edinburgh

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